

BOOK REVIEWS

Digitalis and Other Cardiotonic Drugs.

By ELI RODIN MOVITT, M.D.: Captain Medical Corps, Army of the United States; Internist, Veterans Administration Facility, San Francisco, California. Price \$5.75. Pp. 204, with one illustration and 13 figures. New York, Oxford University Press, 1946.

The monograph under consideration is an able presentation in one volume of the chemical and pharmacologic properties of the useful cardioactive drugs. The information pertaining to them is brought up to date on the basis of clinical and experimental data obtained from an extensive review of the literature.

Each drug or group of drugs is discussed under the following headings: historical data; source and chemical structure; pharmacology; and clinical applications. The short summary at the end of each chapter serves to focus upon each agent the light in which it is viewed at the present time. A large part of the treatise is devoted to a study of digitalis purpurea. The therapeutic effects on the cardiovascular system, the mechanism of diuresis, and the changes in the electrocardiogram are presented in a most comprehensive fashion; the toxic effects are described in similar manner. The clinician perplexed by differences in U.S.P. strengths of digitalis will find the sections on standardization of preparations very helpful. Since emphasis is placed on the pharmacologic aspects of therapy, the section on "clinical applications" is devoted largely to the indications for and contraindications to the employment of digitalis. Certain safeguards and precautions in clinical use are suggested.

The intermediate portion of the treatise is applied mainly to a detailed discussion of the chemistry and pharmacology of the glycosides derived from digitalis lanata. Using digitalis purpurea as the standard, the similarities and dissimilarities of the lanatosides to the standard are related with clarity. A vast amount of clinical and experimental evidence pertaining to the lanatosides has accumulated within the past two decades. Since the use of these glycosides is not widespread in this country, the broader discussion of the clinical applications of these agents may be considered invaluable to those not familiar with them.

The generous sections devoted to the derivatives of strophanthus and squill constitute excellent reviews of the recent work done with these glycosides. The explanation of the proper use of the strophanthins serves to neutralize many fears attending their administration.

The text of the monograph is completed by interesting notes from the literature regarding cardioactive principles derived from various other plant and animal sources. The similarity of the effects of thevetin to those of digitalis are worthy of consideration.

Two helpful charts are appended, one showing the average digitalizing and maintenance doses of the agents discussed and the other enumerating the constituents of the various commercial preparations available.

The repetition of certain comments, particularly those concerning the therapeutic and toxic effects of digitalis purpurea, is useful in comparing the several glycosides with the whole leaf of digitalis. This feature thus becomes

an aid in remembering the properties of the eminent standard, digitalis purpurea.

The monograph is not a handbook for use in the clinical practice of cardiology. It is of greatest value to the clinician interested in the chemical and pharmacologic properties of the drugs he employs. The anesthesiologist will find it useful in keeping himself acquainted with the latest developments in a branch of medicine with which he must be conversant.

C. S. HELLIJAS, M.D.

Anesthetic Methods. By GEOFFREY KAYE, ROBERT ORTON, and DOUGLAS RENTON. Price, 50 shillings. Pp. 706, with 188 illustrations. Melbourne, Australia: W. Ramsey (Surgical) Pty. Ltd., 1946.

This textbook is intended to fill the gap between oversimplified medical school lectures and all inclusive texts written for specialists in anesthesia. The authors are anesthetists associated with the University of Melbourne and with the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia. Their work is based on practical experience with modern English and American technics of anesthesia.

Facts of history and theory are presented briefly as a background to clinical anesthesia. Specialists may criticize this brevity as half truth. Interns and practitioners, plagued with demands of the moment, will welcome the simplicity and usefulness of such an approach.

Basal, inhalation, intravenous, and spinal anesthesia are discussed thoroughly. Local anesthesia is not described since in Australia this is done chiefly by surgeons and since the authors regard regional technics impractical for casual anesthetists. It is unfortunate that such simple methods of anesthesia as caudal block, brachial

plexus block, and lumbar sympathetic block are not described.

The authors' views on choice of anesthesia are conservative. In almost all instances they prefer general to spinal anesthesia. Endotracheal intubation is recommended for routine use in operations on the respiratory airways. They feel that intubation should be used only for laryngeal obstruction in thyroid and abdominal operations. General anesthesia is suggested for cesarean section to avoid hypotension in a potentially hemorrhagic procedure. This view seems extreme when one considers the ease with which this operation can be done with spinal anesthesia. General anesthesia is also favored for obstetrics. Caudal block is passed up as a method for a "skillful administrator." This thought seems to coincide with current opinions held by many who formerly supported caudal analgesia as the end to painful childbirth. Spinal anesthesia is not advised for childbirth, because it relaxes the anus and causes the vulva to become contaminated with feces. This is mentioned as a major drawback to spinal in obstetrics and seems unreasonable.

The outline on premedication is brief and indefinite. Atropine and scopolamine are recommended for use only prior to administration of irritative vapors and intravenous anesthetics. The chapters concerned with the pharmacology of anesthetic agents are concise and informative. The outstanding features of the book are the large numbers of excellent diagrams of anesthesia machines and the descriptions of the use of these machines in administration of anesthetics. Too many textbooks of anesthesia ignore technic and mechanics so that readers are confused with theoretical considerations instead of being instructed in practical procedures. The authors have chosen and described a few procedures that any medical graduate may use with