

Book Review

Tropical Medicine and Parasitology, 5th Edition

Edited by Wallace Peters and Geoffrey Pasvol.

Mosby 2001, ISBN 0723431914, Paperback, 353 pages, illustrated, £39.95

Writing in the advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink* in 1927, Frederick P. Barnard, the National Advertising Manager for the Street Railways Advertising Company, wanted to convey the power of imagery in selling a product. He chose to illustrate his theme with an advertisement for Royal Baking Soda, in which a picture of a smiling boy apparently convinced thousands of American housewives to buy this product and bake a cake for their children that evening. To emphasize his point, he placed next to the advertisement a picture of some Chinese script with the apparent translation underneath: 'Chinese Proverb. A picture is worth ten thousand words.' The 'ten' has been dropped, but this saying (quickly attributed to Confucius) has now become accepted wisdom.

Medical textbooks provide an excellent test of the truth of this adage. Lavishly illustrated texts now abound; some are enhanced by the illustrations, and some are not. The new edition of *Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* by Wallace Peters and Geoffrey Pasvol handsomely demonstrates the power of pictures in conveying a message. This is the fifth edition of this popular photographic atlas, which first appeared in 1977. To describe this book as an atlas, however, does not really do it justice. Along with the photographs—not fading yellowed prints of exotica photographed long ago, but clear color prints—there are extensive notes on each disease. My test for a book is first to look up something you know a lot about, and then something about which you know next to nothing. Malaria is undoubtedly the commonest infection of the returning traveler that we see in the UK, and its global importance needs no emphasis. Peters and Pasvol cover this infection really well; numerous clear pictures of the different parasite forms, disease complications, and (a nice touch) a photograph showing how you should be able to read print through a well-made thick blood film. OK, what about something more recondite? Histoplasmosis—good picture and notes on skin and bone manifestations, as well as its importance as an AIDS-associated infection in the Caribbean.

Looking now for something that I knew nothing about, I found *Hylesia metabus* in the index. What on earth is that? Turning to the page, I found a particularly splendid moth whose poisonous barbs have apparently

caused widescale outbreaks of urticarial rashes in tourist centers. This is not the only example of how well this book deals with rare conditions. I was impressed by the level of detail on conditions that merit scant or no space in much bigger textbooks. It is up to date too, with a particular emphasis on more modern methods of diagnosis, such as antigen tests for malaria and various immunologic assays.

Will this book be useful to those who practice medicine in the tropics, in much less well-resourced areas than the UK, where I am writing this review? Given the breadth of coverage and the clarity of the pictures, I am sure that this will prove a very useful book in both the first and the third worlds. The book presents each disease in a straightforward fashion, which includes some more sophisticated tests less likely to be available in the developing world, but with an emphasis on local factors in disease and simple diagnostic procedures. Rightly, in my opinion, it devotes very little attention to therapy. This is not the primary aim of the book, and will, of course, be influenced very strongly by the area of the world in which the disease is encountered.

In summary, therefore, I most strongly recommend this book, wherever you practice medicine. It will prove of value to those established at the sharp end of treating patients with tropical diseases, as well as those in training and their teachers. It will also be of great interest to those who work in diagnostic laboratories. It is priced in the UK at about £40, which, given the extensive use of color, is good value. Although you might wish for more details on your favorite tropical disease, this would make the book unnecessarily long. In any case, the breadth of coverage is impressive, and you could hardly want more photographs in a book. Frederick P. Barnard would, I am sure, be pleased that the truth of his advertising dictum lives on.

T. J. Evans

Department of Infectious Diseases,
Faculty of Medicine,
Imperial College,
Hammersmith Hospital,
Du Cane Road,
London, UK
E-mail: tom.evans@ic.ac.uk