

Biochemistry of Alcohol and Alcoholism

by L. J. Kricka and P. M. S. Clark
Ellis Horwood; Chichester, 1979
285 pages. £19.50

This book makes a valuable contribution to the already extensive literature on alcohol. Written by two clinical biochemists it brings together, in a form not previously seen by this reviewer, all of the pertinent information relating to the ways in which alcohol affects the various substances that are, or can be measured in blood and other body fluids for the purpose of diagnosis and the improvement of understanding of disease. Perhaps the most valuable of the seven chapters is the one devoted to biochemical tests for the detection and assessment of alcohol abuse. How to diagnose alcoholism is a perennial problem and one which few authors of books on alcohol have previously tackled, partly because until comparatively recently few reliable data were available on how to do it, but mainly because of the inherent difficulties. Even the present authors have had to admit that 'as yet no simple and reliable biochemical test to distinguish the ethanol abuser from the non-abuser is available'. This is singularly unfortunate since one of the hallmarks of the alcoholic is his inherent dis-

honesty — at least in relation to alcohol — so that reliance upon the clinical history, the mainstay of medical practice is misplaced in this condition. Nevertheless, prudent use of the information collected together in this book goes some considerable way towards resolving the problem.

Other chapters in this easy-to-read, well-laid-out book deal with the biochemistry of alcohol metabolism in man, the acute toxicity of alcoholic drinks and the effect of alcohol abuse upon metabolic processes in general. There are brief chapters on the definition of alcoholism and on diseases associated with it. This is, however, primarily a book about the clinical biochemistry of alcohol. It is up to date and well referenced. It can be thoroughly recommended to anyone with a more than social interest in alcohol, but particularly to those who encounter alcoholism professionally whether in the clinic or laboratory.

V. Marks

Vitamin D

Edited by D. E. M. Lawson
Academic Press; London, New York, San Francisco, 1978
x + 433 pages. \$42.40, £20.50

Over the past decade there have been enormous strides made in our understanding of the mode of action of the fat-soluble vitamins (notably vitamins D and K) which had until then lagged far behind the detailed knowledge available for most, although not all, of their water-soluble counterparts. In the case of vitamin D this explosion of knowledge has demonstrated clearly the nature of the relationship between

the regulation of serum Ca^{2+} concentration and the adequacy of dietary supply which was implicit from the earlier nutritional studies. However the studies have also revealed a unique situation in which a substance classified as a vitamin is transformed by successive tissue metabolism to an active principle which promotes input of Ca^{2+} to the blood both from the diet via its effects on the intestinal mucosa and also