

BOOK REVIEW

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHARMACOLOGY AND THERAPEUTICS, by J. A. Gunn with the assistance of J. D. P. Graham. Ninth Edition. Pp. ix + 327 (including Index). O.U.P., London, 1958. 18s. (U.K. only).

It is a pleasure to see a new edition of a small textbook which has served many medical students well, and to find that it is keeping up to date, without losing its original flavour or growing unduly in size. The first edition was written in 1929 with the aim of achieving brevity by selection and arrangement and it is remarkable how well this aim is still achieved, in the face of a devastating increase in the amount of knowledge from which the selection is to be drawn. The new edition retains an unhurried, but not unbusinesslike style which is pleasant to read and encourages its steady perusal. It is possible to argue about the selection: it could hardly be otherwise, for what two pharmacologists would agree what to include in 300 small pages with all the subject to choose from? Here there is all factual material, and no discussion of how the facts are discovered; therapeutic trials are not mentioned in the index, the value and defects of evidence from experiments in animals are passed by, and there are no references to the original literature. Since an unpredictable amount of the factual material is quite likely to be displaced in importance quite soon by new discoveries, and since the students who read this book will be heavily bombarded with such discoveries and their counterfeits, a guide to the evidence is the most urgent need of contemporary students, and it may be regretted that there is no development of a critical apparatus in this introduction to pharmacology. The factual material itself, though not lacking in up-to-date material, retains more of the early twentieth century than might appear in a brand new book: it is surprising still to meet references to chlorosis, and questionable whether arsenic compounds deserve nearly twice as much space as barbiturates. But the simplicity of presentation has much to commend it, and the students who want the bare facts quickly (and cheaply) will be well served by this book.

MILES WEATHERALL.