Current problems in orthopaedics and trauma
By R. C. Mohanti

The pathology and epidemiology faced by orthopaedic surgeons is common throughout the world, but their incidence and frequency vary geographically. Visitors to India are always impressed by the high standard practised in the major centres, but in that vast country there are many rural areas where practitioners cannot confine their attention to a particular anatomical area, surgical technique or pharmacological treatment. Professor Mohanti has produced a well-written book with no pretension to be comprehensive. It is thoroughly practical, a working book, explaining the why and wherefore of each mode of management with sound, sensible shortcuts to investigation and diagnosis.

It is now increasingly difficult for anyone to write every chapter for a book with the same measure of expertise; and yet it is from the intimacy and character of a single teacher that the most creative messages are conveyed. This is not a book for the novice but for the established enthusiast in the very thick of training – which means all of us. It is richly, if selectively, referenced to provide the evidence for his logical approach to situations commonly seen in the Third World, but forgotten in the West, to its detriment. The book’s 190 pages are full of hard-won experience, covering eight selected subjects, from tuberculosis and bone tumours to complications of internal fixation of fractures and low back pain.

No reader is excluded by virtue of limited equipment, and outcomes are demonstrated by simple photographs; that of hip fracture, for example, is demonstrated by the photograph of the patient squatting – an accomplishment less essential in the West.

In his preface, Professor Mohanti expresses his thanks to the publishers, but it must be said that he has been let down by poor illustration. Excellent points are not helped by dark, opaque pictures; too many frankly obscure, and some wrongly labelled. The figure on page 124 shows a portal of entry for a nail ‘too medial’ when it is obviously too lateral. There is no mention in the text of the huge comminuted crack up the shaft of the femur, plainly visible on the book’s cover, nor of the fact that the medulla has not been reamed prior to the insertion of a massive intramedullary nail. Disaster was thus inevitable.

The preface is headed by a quotation from Andre Gide, to the effect that herewith is little that is new but much that has been forgotten, and regularly has to be re-learned. We live in an age when orthopaedic training places emphasis on perfection in appearance, which implies a certain cynicism of the healing process. This book, possibly aimed at his fellow countrymen, will be of huge value and importance to the practising surgeon in the West. Not to be aware of its message would be dangerous.

M. Laurence

Sir Herbert Seddon: and the book he nearly didn’t write
By J. Merrick

This is a very important book. It is not only an outstanding portrait of one of the more important figures in 20th century orthopaedics, but is also a compelling description of the development of surgery of the peripheral nerves.

The first chapter describes Seddon’s early life from his education at Hulme grammar school (he was inexplicably turned down by Manchester Grammar School) through his studies at Bart’s where he won a fistful of scholarships and the gold medal of the University of London, to his appointment as Nuffield Professor of Orthopaedics at Oxford in 1940. He had, of course, by this time also been awarded the Robert Jones gold medal of the British Orthopaedic Association.

It was at this point that he was first approached by Charles Macmillan, then manager of E & S Livingstone, the noted Edinburgh publishers, with an offer to publish his forthcoming book on peripheral nerve injuries. The second paragraph of this letter starts ‘I therefore trust that you will make steady progress in its compilation...’. Thereafter progress was certainly steady, but there was the small matter of a World War to be endured, and a large clinical workload to accommodate. In 1948, he moved back to the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (RNOH), taking the Peripheral Nerve Injury unit with him. His London practice flourished and he became increasingly involved in the work of the BOA, leading to his subsequent appointment as president. I am slightly sad that no space could be found for extracts from his 1961 presidential address to the BOA, although it is referenced. His waspish descriptions of various types of surgeon are as apposite today as they were 50 years ago. They should be more widely appreciated.
A whole chapter is devoted to Seddon’s care of and personal relationship with Sir Winston Churchill, based on Seddon’s own records and those from the Churchill archives. Each man clearly had great regard for the other.

It took Seddon 30 years to deliver his book, Surgical disorders of the peripheral nerves. The correspondence between Seddon and Macmillan not only remained cordial but is a remarkable record of the friendship which developed between the two men. Unsurprisingly, when the book finally appeared, it was hailed as a masterpiece.

After reading this book I was left wondering what prompted Julia Merrick to undertake her researches in the first place. While she generously acknowledges all those who have helped her to prepare this volume, there is no biography of the author nor any indication as to what drew her to the life and work of Sir Herbert Seddon in the first place. While a degree of reserve is always attractive, I felt very slightly cheated by not being informed about the relationship between the author and her subject. This, however, is hardly a criticism. This book should be read, probably repeatedly, by anyone with an interest in surgery of the peripheral nerves and certainly by anyone who has ever passed through the Nuffield Department in Oxford or the RNOH. It will also be of solace to any writer who has ever missed a deadline for the delivery of an abstract, paper, chapter or book.

Finally, this is not just a book about Sir Herbert Seddon. It also charts the rise and contributions of other great men in the field of peripheral nerve surgery: Donal Brooks, George Bonney and Philip Yeoman among others. Rolfe Birch contributes an elegant introduction and, appropriately, has the last word; his contribution to the surgery of peripheral nerves is of a later generation and must await another author to write it as splendidly as Julia Merrick has that of Sir Herbert Seddon.

A. Ross

Orthopedic management of patients with hemophilia in developing countries
Edited by M. Tariq Sohail and T. Shamsi

Major advances in hemophilia therapy have had a very positive impact on results in the more affluent countries which are able to afford coagulation factor concentrates. Life expectancy is virtually normal and the introduction of recombinant concentrates has eliminated the risk of transmission of pathogens such as the viruses of hepatitis and HIV. Prophylactic administration of factor VIII two or three times a week prevents recurrent haemarthrosis and the development of crippling deformities which would otherwise inevitably occur by early adulthood. By contrast, the situation in poorer countries remains dire. This is primarily due to the high cost of the necessary blood products. The World Federation of Hemophilia (WFH) estimates that some two thirds of the estimated 340,000 patients with haemophilia still receive no proper treatment.

Professor Sohail has assembled an impressive panel of 62 contributors from all over the world. Most are members of the very active Musculoskeletal Committee of the WFH and have very extensive practical experience of the management of the disease. This authoritative text is very much a practical handbook, covering every aspect of haemophilia care, in a logical sequence. Many surgeons in Europe will rarely face the complications which are regularly seen in poorer countries, including contractures, ankylosed joints and pseudotumours. The surgical aspects of these topics are covered in detail, as well as conservative modes such as physiotherapy and orthotics. As a consequence of the lack of proper blood products, orthopaedic surgeons in the developing world have been forced to develop innovative therapies; it is interesting to see that many such procedures are now increasingly adopted in the developed world. The techniques described in detail include synovectomy using radionuclides and chemicals such as rifampicin. A point the authors make repeatedly is that patients should be treated in dedicated specialist centres by a multidisciplinary team in order to guarantee the requisite collective experience in treating this rare condition. Guidance is also provided on the selection and appropriate dose of coagulation factor concentrates.

The pitfalls of operating on patients with inhibitors to factor VIII are rightly emphasised. Up-to-date literature citations at the end of each chapter will help readers to find more detailed information. This comprehensive and authoritative book contains a wealth of practical advice and information. It will be of interest to haematologists and physiotherapists as well as orthopaedic surgeons. Although it is focused on the developing world, the many surgeons working in wealthier countries, who work abroad to support the numerous ongoing WFH international programmes, would be well advised to read this book.

P. Giangrande