

Correspondence

Crohn's or poisoning?

SIR, — Recent work by Bjarnason *et al*¹ on blood and protein loss through small intestinal inflammation induced by non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) would appear to have potential medico-legal implications on the result of a celebrated murder trial which took place in 1859. A certain Dr Smethurst was found by jury trial to have murdered his wife by administration of an unknown poison. The Home Secretary, however, taking the advice of Sir Benjamin Brodie, Surgeon to St George's Hospital, granted Dr Smethurst a free pardon since there was not 'absolute and complete evidence of his guilt'.²

The necropsy findings have suggested subsequently that his wife had Crohn's disease.³ In the small intestine 'nothing remarkable was observed until the lower end of the ileum was reached, when at about three feet from its termination in the caecum, the mucous membrane commenced to exhibit an inflammatory response'. In the caecum 'inflammation of the most acute and violent character was observed . . . the bare muscular coat was seen beneath. The muscular coat itself in the caecum was likewise infiltrated with this exudation . . . and there is no doubt that through this part of the intestine some transudation had occurred which had set up the peritonitis. No actual perforation was discoverable.'⁴

These findings could also be explained by severe NSAID induced ileitis. Salicylic acids are present in large concentrations in oil of wintergreen and administration of such medication, which was in common use at the time, may have resulted in the first reported case of non-steroidal drug induced intestinal inflammation in man.^{1,5}

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References

- 1 Bjarnason I, Zaneli G, Smith T, *et al*. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug induced intestinal inflammation in humans. *Gastroenterology* 1987; **93**: 480–9.
- 2 Home Office records. *Criminal entry books (HO12/106)*. (At the Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey.)
- 3 Fielding JF. Inflammatory bowel disease. *Br Med J* 1985; **290**: 47–8.
- 4 Wilks S. Morbid appearances in the intestines of Miss Bankes. *London Medical Gazette* 1859; **2**: 264–5.

- 5 Langman MJS, Morgan L, Worrall A. Use of anti-inflammatory drugs by patients admitted with small or large bowel perforations and haemorrhage. *Br Med J* 1985; **290**: 347–9.

Book review

Surgery of the stomach, duodenum and small intestine. By Scott and Sawyers. (Pp. 1000; illustrated; £125.) Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

This book is certainly very readable but how it will fare in relation to other books on the subject is open to question. It contains a number of standard aspects such as the history of gastrointestinal surgery, some basic anatomy and physiology and it also includes chapters on endoscopy, radiology including angiography, as well as some good chapters on sonography, computed tomography and nuclear magnetic resonance. With these exceptions the remainder is an update of standard procedures, most of which are dealt with in other standard textbooks.

There are a number of illustrations, many of which are relatively unsophisticated for a book which costs £125. Though it has liberal references, some attention might have been paid to recommended reading. I found little that was new and nothing which was innovative. It should find its way into medical libraries though in my view it is unlikely to be purchased by many individual readers.

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Books received

Crime victims, needs, services and the voluntary sector. By R I Mawby and M L Gill. (Pp. 261; illustrated; £14.50.) London: Associated Book Publishers (UK) Limited, 1987.

Histopathologie du tube digestif. By F Potet, J Barge, J F Flejou, and P Zeitoun. (Pp. 324; illustrated; 690F.) Paris: Masson, 1987.

Gastrointestinal function. Vol 4. Edited by Y Kasuya, M Tsuchiya, F Nagao and Y Matsuo. (Pp. 167; illustrated, \$72.) International Congress Series, 1986.

International Congress Series, 1986. Lecture notes on immunology. By G Reeves. (Pp. 197; illustrated; no price stated.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1987.

Clinical tests renal disease. By P Sweny and Z Varghese. (Pp. 216; illustrated; £15.00.) London, Wolfe Medical Publications Limited, 1987.

Pathology of the mesothelium. Edited by J S P Jones. (Pp. 268; illustrated; £93.00.) Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1987.