A New Look at Child Health


This little book by two London paediatricians paints a picture of the state of child health in Britain to-day which is probably as accurate a representation as is possible from one viewpoint. Inevitably it has a London bias and some of the ills of paediatrics described are peculiar to metropolises and cannot be avoided by better management in the great regional centres. Nevertheless, most of the authors' credo will be acceptable as their own to paediatricians throughout the country. In looking to the future, the sights are set high—perhaps unrealistically high—but they give the thoughtful paediatrician a glimpse of a paediatric Utopia to aim at.

In the opening chapters, the nature and problems of child health are described, and if the claims made for paediatrics and paediatricians are at times inflated, they are exaggerated for the sake of emphasis. In comparing paediatric attitudes with those of general medicine, however, the authors do less than justice to the development of social medicine. They seem to forget that, whereas the academic Department of Child Health comprises both hospital and social paediatrics, these two aspects of medicine are represented in many medical schools by two separate Departments—Medicine and Social Medicine. While the former may be preoccupied with hospital medicine, the latter shares with Child Health a broad interest in community and preventive medicine.

The authors go on to describe the work of the general practitioner in paediatrics, of the hospital-based paediatrician, and of the preventive services for children. Current thought about theories and practice of child care in hospital receives detailed consideration and a short survey is made of paediatric research in progress and needed. A chapter on administration deals concisely with the organization of health services for children in England. The chapter on education is perhaps least satisfactory, but it could hardly be expected that teachers in a London hospital could adequately present the ferment of new ideas and the variety of experiences in undergraduate teaching centres in other parts of the country. Many of the innovations suggested are standard practice elsewhere and it is doubtful if it is true of many medical schools outside London that "most students first hear about percentiles and standard deviations during their paediatric appointment". Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that half the undergraduate medical schools in the country are in the south-east and that none has a chair of Child Health, so that there is justification for emphasizing the lowest prevailing standards, at the risk of giving a misleading impression of British paediatrics as a whole. This is not to say that all is well elsewhere—far from it. As Joseph and Mac Keith point out, what paediatrics is and does—let alone what it could do—are unknown to many, even in the medical profession. There is too little collaboration and co-operation between the many services concerned with children, and too little understanding of the needs of children by the boards and committees which decide policy and make plans. Many excellent recommendations are made by the authors, but it is to be feared that too few will be implemented, at least in the foreseeable future. If every administrative officer and board chairman would "read, learn and inwardly digest" this book, the children of to-morrow might be better served than they are to-day, or indeed are likely to be as things are developing in some areas.

Perhaps the least encouraging aspect of the future of Child Health in this country is the dearth of young paediatricians with a thorough grounding and real interest in the aims and outlooks of social and preventive paediatrics. Too many of those in training are intent on being hospital doctors for children and it is doubtful whether, if given more time to acquire wider understanding of child life as recommended by Joseph and Mac Keith, they would use it in this way. The suggested recruitment of senior medical registrars to paediatrics may help to make up the deficit in numbers but will not improve the quality. Perhaps if all students, undergraduate and post-graduate, could be persuaded to read this book, they might succumb to the fascination of the study of Child Health, and learn that it is a university discipline of wide social and academic significance as well as a life's work of absorbing interest.

The Spiral After-Effect


The perception of apparent reverse movement of a stationary object immediately after switching the gaze from a moving or apparently moving object is known as the after-effect of apparent movement. This illusion has been investigated sporadically over the last century; more recently with specific reference to the perception of such phenomena as moving and stationary spirals. Dr. Holland has produced a clearly written objective monograph which summarises the historical field in relation to current work including his own studies. The phenomena is found to vary with the nature of the stimulus and the individual. Individual variability has been found to depend on such factors as personality including rigidity and suggestibility characteristics, age, intelligence, motivation within the experimental situation and the immediate level of anxiety. Clearly, with so many factors influencing it, it is difficult to apply clinically, but attempts have been made to use it as a test for brain damage and its localization and for drug intoxication.

There must still remain doubts as to whether the spiral after-effect will ever prove a stable enough characteristic of the individual for it to be useful as a diagnostic aid. Meanwhile the current status of the subject has been enthusiastically but fairly presented by the author. A few spelling mistakes (e.g. psycho logical for physiological, 2nd word, para. 4 on page 100) and the relatively high price of the book are handicaps.

Spatiocardiography. Textbook and Atlas


The foundations of vectorcardiography were laid by Einthoven at the turn of the century. Progress has been disappointingly slow despite revolutionary advances in electronic technique. There are many reasons for this: the apparatus is complex and costly; the theoretical justification of the method requires solid geometry, an unfamiliar branch of mathematics, and physicists are reluctant to bowing from scalar electrocardiography and to learn a new discipline. The author has met many of these objections in this book, but there is not sufficient clinical material to
**NEW EDITIONS**

The Care of the Newly Born Infant

This is the third edition of this well known book that has emerged from Leeds. It is not stated that it is intended for any particular group of readers although it would seem that the student midwife has much to gain from the text. This fact should not detract in any way from the more general appeal that it will undoubtedly enjoy, since it is comprehensive in scope and is excellently illustrated with over 300 figures. Much attention has been given to the nursing techniques necessary for this very specialised subject, and this is a reflection of the nursing representation among the collaborative authors.

The subject matter is not confined to the normal but attention is also given to congenital abnormalities, infections and neonatal emergencies, with helpful sections on their immediate management.

Some criticisms must be made, in particular the initial chapter entitled 'The Challenge', which failed utterly to stimulate the reviewer, as did the four posed illustrations in it depicting the several uniformed and hatted ladies that the newly born encounters in Leeds. The chapter on Mothercraft, complete with illustrations of posters for the walls of the centre, was also uninspiring.

In spite of these few shortcomings, this book offers excellent value and is to be recommended.

Bailey's Textbook of Histology

This American textbook of normal histology originally published in 1904, has been brought fully up-to-date by the first revision since 1958. It justly claims to include the new methods of electron microscopy, histochemical and immunohistological techniques and autoradiographic and X-ray diffraction studies. At first sight all this, together with over 600 references, is rather overwhelming in a book "primarily for students rather than a source book for teachers and specialists". However, in reality, the normal cellular structure of the human body, with some comparative anatomy included where appropriate, is simply and clearly set out in an easily readable way. Everywhere structure is related to function. In the words of the author, "The cell is not only a unit of structure but also of physiological activity". "The structures seen under the microscope assume a meaning only in the light of their functional significance". (A surprise in a book that, for example, gives a brief but perfectly adequate account of the modern theories of renal tubular function is the omission of autonomic responses to the alveolar lining layer). There is no undue pre-occupation with the minutiae of technique. Modern methods are skilfully used to explain the appearances seen under the conventional light microscope and to reveal the meaning of cellular physiology. The book is well produced and lavishly illustrated—the electron micrographs are of superb quality. It is highly recommended as a basic medical scientific text of quality.

**Erratum**

Vol. 42 no 487 page 333 (May 1966). The price of 'A Diagnostic Approach to Chest Diseases' by Lillington and Jampis was incorrectly quoted as £6 16s. It is £5 16s.