Book Reviews

Brain and Reading. Volume 54, edited by Curt von Euler, Ingvar Lundberg and Gunnar Lennerstrand. Pp. xviii + 390. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1989. £50.00.

This book edited by three distinguished workers from Sweden reports the proceedings of what is claimed to be a cross disciplinary conference reflecting major advances in the field of developmental dyslexia. The runners in this field come from widely spaced starting blocks in neurology, neuropsychology and psycholinguistics. Twenty-nine chapters are contained under the headings of Introduction, Hemispheric Specializations and Interactions, Phonetics and Phonology, Memory Functions and Language, and Visual Analysis and Saccadic Strategies in Reading.

What used to be considered, in simplistic terms, a discrete area of developmental arrest in the language centres of the brain leading to learning difficulties, particularly prominent in children of middle-class origins, has matured into a much more sophisticated and refined analysis.

We learn that early development anomalies of the left hemisphere affect linguistic processing and phonetic discrimination. Left hemisphere function suppresses right hemisphere involvement, though a surprising degree of language function is now thought to depend on the integrity of the right hemisphere. Language difficulties may reflect defects in the connections between the two hemispheres. The old fashioned notion that dyslexia was a discrete deficit is now challenged by findings of subtle associated defects in attention, perception and motor functions. Memory disturbances are significantly impaired so that many dyslexics have a reduced ability to get conscious access to the phonemic level. Defects in comprehension of language add to the child's difficulties. It is of interest that although abnormal eye movements are not responsible for reading difficulties, in dyslexic subjects the control of eye movements and of saccadic strategies may interfere with the processing of information which leads to impaired reading.

Overall this book contains a remarkable amount of up to date information which will be of value to those concerned with dyslexic children and to those involved in research. Unfortunately the production is appalling, the publishers having accepted a variety of typescripts, some with justified some with unjustified right margins, which produced an untidy and uneven appearance which may deter many would-be readers. Many of the papers are simply scripts of work published elsewhere by the authors. There is inevitably much repetition which has evaded the editorial red pencil. What could have been an invaluable collection of essays or reviews is presented as an ill-digested morass of information. The current fashion for exigency amongst medical publishers seems to precipitate reputable editors along with its tide of indelible print. Sadly most workers in this field will not want to purchase this type of presentation, and the present

restraints on libraries will not encourage them to select this ephemeral work for its shelves.

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Communicable and Tropical Diseases, G.C. Cook. Pp. 330. Heinemann Medical Books, London, 1988.

This book is a volume in the 'Mainstream Medicine' series, which is designed both to help the postgraduate examination candidate and to provide information that will be of benefit in the clinical situation. This particular volume is wide ranging in its contents; the author (from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) has not only provided concise descriptions of numerous infections, ranging from the commonplace to the distinctly exotic, but has also included topics such as the control of hospital-acquired infections, antimicrobial therapy and vaccinations for travel. I think he has tried to squeeze in too much and the result is patchy and rather lacklustre.

As might be expected, given the author's background, the accounts of tropical diseases are the most detailed. At times the detail verges on the excessive: it seems bizarre to mention metagonimiasis and gastrodisciasis in a book of this length – especially when there is barely any clinical detail about such common infections as rotavirus or Norwalk agent infections and nothing at all about the congenital rubella syndrome. Indeed, there are whole sections that are very sketchy and would provide very little authoritative information for those in either the examination hall or the clinic. The book does have the virtue of being relatively inexpensive but there are others that I would recommend as offering better value-for-money.

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Comparative Nutrition, edited by Sir Kenneth Blaxter and Ian Macdonald. Pp. vii + 264. John Libbey & Co., London, 1988. £24.00 UK; \$47 US; FF285.

Comparative Nutrition is a specialized handbook which records the proceedings of the 9th International Symposium on Nutrition sponsored by the Trustees of the Rank Prize Funds. Comparative studies are the bedrock on which major advances often proceed and are an integral part of research activity in all the medical sciences. Without research on animals one could not