

of the newborn infant in an intensive care environment. It is thus devoted largely to such time-honoured aspects as primitive reflexes, assessment of maturity, the post-mature infant (women are lucky these days if they even manage to get to term without intervention) and contains the inevitable picture of a CT scan. A very different picture would be painted by a neonatologist or a neonatal neurologist, replete with ultrasound scans (which have revolutionized the imaging of the newborn brain), showing the evolution of periventricular haemorrhage, leukomalacia, porencephalic cysts and ventricular dilatation.

The chapter on development has a series of interesting illustrations of fundi but does not include one (or more) of retrolental fibroplasia, which is still with us despite its potential prevention.

A surprising omission in the discussion of possible factors in the pathogenesis of myelomeningocele is any mention of a possible role of vitamin deficiency in the mother, although old chestnuts such as potato blight are discussed.

The book is well illustrated throughout and, with a few exceptions, the illustrations are clear and of a high standard. The normal looking boy in Figure 20.2 is supposed to illustrate adenoma sebaceum; perhaps a close-up photograph of the face might have shown the lesions more adequately. Figure 3.14 is an unusually severe (and perhaps unique) illustration of the usually benign central core disease and is thus somewhat misleading. The illustration of her three affected siblings (3.15) is more representative of the disease.

In their discussion on dermatomyositis they state 'confirmation of the diagnosis depends, in the opinion of most experts, on the finding of typical changes in muscle biopsy material.' Unfortunately, this is one of the common causes of delayed diagnosis as the biopsy in childhood dermatomyositis often does not show the classical changes. Perhaps one should stress that a negative pathological investigation in these circumstances should not negate a reliable clinical diagnosis and the child should have still the benefit of a trial of treatment.

This book deserves a place in every paediatrician's library.

V. Dubowitz
Royal Postgraduate Medical School,
London W12 0HS.

A History of Women's Bodies, Edward Shorter. Pp. xiv + 398. Penguin Books, London, 1984. £3.95.

This is a wonderful book. It is the distillate of an enormous amount of reading and research carried out by a master historian. The eleven chapters contain a beautifully reasoned account of the awful condition of women throughout the centuries. Although Professor Shorter, who is a Professor of History at the University of Toronto, gives over 1600 references to support his indictment of the way women have suffered over the ages from those who abused or permitted abuse of their bodies, he writes with such skill and verve that it was impossible for me to skip even a sentence, let alone a page. His arguments are tight. His English is lucid and his style compelling. It is not only a history of women's bodies but a history of how women were seen by men, by other women, by the religious authorities, by rulers and by doctors, midwives and traditional birth attendants throughout history.

Professor Shorter's knowledge of obstetrics and gynaecology is so enormous that one has difficulty in believing that he is not a practising consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist. He describes in great detail the barbarities formerly practised by traditional birth attendance in Europe and the North Americas. We should not be complacent: they are still practised extensively in the Indian sub-continent and in parts of Africa and South America. Deaths in labour, deaths from meddling midwifery, permanent damage to the pelvic organs resulting in fistulae, the inability to treat uterine cancer, myths about menstruation, ravages of pelvic inflammatory disease, the iniquities of blood-letting and purging and the terrifying results of taking abortifacients are all most vividly and compellingly described.

Lastly, the author shows how the corner has turned and how men are concerned for their womenfolk in a way that, in spite of the love poems and plays that have been handed down to us, they quite clearly were not except in exceptional cases in previous ages.

Women have always been exploited by men and by other women. They probably are still because in their new roles where they have to act as breadwinners, wives, mistresses, mothers and intellectual companions, they are still shouldering heavier burdens than many men. But things have, as is shown in this beautiful book, improved immeasurably.

Now this book is in paperback it is one that every man who has ever been interested in a woman will be intrigued to read. It is above all, too, a feminists' manual – but that clearly was not what the author primarily intended.

E.E. Philipp
94 Harley Street,
London W1N 1AP.