

Book Reviews

Virgin Birth, edited by R. Silman. Pp. 114. WFT Press, London, 1991. Paperback £10.50.

Religious heresies abounded at the last approach of a millenium. As the next one nears we seem to be pursuing a number of 'medical heresies'. This is the theme of a series of books WFT Press have launched as the 20th century nears its end. The first of these, *Virgin Birth*, originates in the controversy which followed a letter to *The Lancet* written by Sue Jennings, a fertility counsellor at the Royal London Hospital. She described 'virgin birth syndrome', which she defined as 'women with no intention of having a sexual relationship who wish to have a child through assisted conception'.

In the ensuing London Hospital Medical College symposium, on which this book is based, Dr Jennings was joined by experts who share her interest in integrating medicine with the arts and humanities. The convener, Robert Silman, is not only a senior lecturer in reproductive physiology but has a degree in philosophy from the Sorbonne, and those presenting papers are no less remarkable. A lecturer in medical ethics, a former Anglican priest turned Roman Catholic journalist, a medical historian (who has written about her own experience of infertility), a lawyer, a child psychologist, a social anthropologist, a gynaecologist and the press officer for a major charity all submit their ideas for open discussion. Issues of fertility and assisted conception seem to give particular cause for dissent, and any professional involved in this field will find *Virgin Birth* a stimulating account. The seminar format may be hard to follow but it is rewarding.

Tara Kaufmann of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service is probably right to conclude that virgin birth is the least of the problems presented by new reproductive possibilities. More millennial pursuits to follow?

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North American Health Care Policy in the 1990s, edited by A. King, T. Hyclak, R. Thornton and S. McMahon. Pp. xi + 284, illustrated. Wiley, Chichester, 1993. Hardback, £35.00.

This book is an edited collection of papers delivered in a lecture series at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (USA) under the auspices of the Martindale Center for the Study of Private Enterprise, subsidized by the Canadian Embassy. The topics are examined under three rubrics: (1) 'conceptual issues in the design of national health policy'; (2) 'comparative studies of some of the

details of Canadian and American health care; and (3) 'a critique of the current US situation'. The authors are a mixed company: economists, political scientists, physician administrators; and geographically, American, Canadian and British.

Like most collections of essays on a central topic, there is an unevenness in style and approach, some duplication of argument, and even contradictions, not just differences of opinion. As might be expected from the sponsorship and the participants, the leitmotif is conservative, but there is a fairly strong support for the Canadian way. In the final and long chapter on US potentials for reform, the article is written by American Medical Association officials and their plan is clearly the choice.

The book offers some interesting and challenging reading, but it is not a definitive characterization of the differences between Canadian and US positions, approaches or possibilities. It lacks a unifying thread, or an overview and analysis that would be helpful. It is somewhat tilted to the conservative side, but maybe it reflects a conservative tilt in our society.

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Human Dissection for the Health Sciences, J.H. Langdon. Pp. 427, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £23.50.

I wish I had had this book when I started anatomy. There is an interesting preamble on the purposes of dissection, on the sources of the cadavers and on conduct in the Dissecting Room. The language of anatomy is explained. There are many simple line drawings, glossaries and also notes on the clinical implications which form the *raison d'être* for this subject. Highly recommended as an introductory handbook for medical students, physiotherapists and other paramedical workers.

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Human Nutrition and Dietetics, 9th Edition, edited by J.S. Garrow and W.P.T. James. Pp. 847, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £34.95.

This is the direct descendant of 'Davidson and Passmore'. The Scottish influence is maintained by Dr James and 16 of the other 49 contributors who otherwise represent a truly international team of known excellence. The book

has changed and grown a little (666 pages in 1986). The editors justify both – the latter largely as a result of commissioning specialist clinicians to contribute – and disarmingly admit to some resultant inconsistencies.

It is a sturdily bound paperback and should sustain regular use. The text and figures are clearly set out, but the photographs barely achieve their aim – they certainly necessitate the supplementary use of an atlas. The inevitable march of progress has deprived us of a Titian Venus in the new chapter on obesity!

Complex clinical issues are dealt with quite briskly, but each section appeared up to date and accurate with few typographical errors. Despite a 49-page index the cross-referencing is disappointing. Examples are iron deficiency in intestinal failure/malabsorption yields unhelpful suggested pages, although the topic is addressed appropriately (briefly) in the chapter on gastrointestinal disease, and resting energy expenditure is barely linked by the index to the key chapter in which it is discussed. Computer-generated indexing of future editions should help. The appendices provide a compendium of useful nutritional data not readily available together elsewhere.

I concentrated my assessment on aspects relevant to the reader of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* and his or her students; this is only one approach to a thoroughly recommendable book which should be in every medical library. Medical students will probably not wish to buy it but should certainly refer to it. Dieticians, non-medical nutritionists, and non-specialist clinicians whose work touches on nutrition, should want it on their shelves. It is excellent value for money.

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ABC of Child Abuse, 2nd Edition, edited by R. Meadow. Pp. 75, illustrated. BMJ, London, 1993. Paperback, £12.95.

The first edition of this excellent guide to child abuse appeared 4 years ago and was immediately recognized as providing, within one slim volume, a distillation of the collective views of experts. The second edition has been updated by the addition of some newer areas. These include the ophthalmic presentations of abuse and an extremely useful chapter which deals with the guiding principles of the Children Act 1989, the various Court Orders which may be made and the procedural steps involved.

There is an increasing need for all doctors who deal professionally with children to be sensitive to the early warning signs and presentation of the many forms of child abuse, and alert to those physical signs that are suggestive of abuse and those which are indicative.

The *ABC of Child Abuse* is clear and lucid with simple, easily absorbed, yet comprehensive descriptions of the varied forms of abuse, accompanied by an extremely generous provision of superb illustrations. Management too is very adequately dealt with. The reader is provided with one of the simplest and easiest routes available to acquire knowledge and understanding of various types of

abuse, confidence in their recognition and an appreciation of the skills and contribution to be made by other professionals in the context of a multidisciplinary approach to child protection.

Despite its simplicity of style, much detailed information is contained within the chapters of this book which may also serve as a useful source of reference to those experienced in this field of clinical practice. It is highly recommended.

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600 MCQs in Anaesthesia: Basic Sciences, 2nd Edition. N.W. Goodman and C. Johnson. Pp. 292. Churchill Livingstone, London, New York, Tokyo, Melbourne, 1993. Paperback, £11.95.

The second edition of this paperback is aimed at Part II of the examination, the questions being set out in 20 papers of 30 questions in an attempt to simulate an examination. Many of the questions are repeated and I expected to find 600 *different* questions.

The introduction is worth reading but the authors do not necessarily follow their own advice by introducing ambiguous, devious and trick questions and state 'that agents that are no longer available or rarely used should not appear in multiple choice examinations'. Perhaps they are unaware that decamethonium is no longer in current use and ecothiopate is no longer available in the UK.

The section on physics is reasonable and examination candidates will be hard pressed on the physiology. However, there are too many inconsistencies, especially in pharmacology, where many of the questions are still valid; the answers require updating. Neostigmine is said to have no effect at the presynaptic sites but there is evidence to the contrary from animal experiments. The knowledgeable candidate will be penalized for being knowledgeable. Again it is stated that neostigmine, quite correctly, increases peristalsis but to say that it causes diarrhoea is only a presumption.

The value of this volume, for which there is still room for improvement, is for those candidates who already know the subject and are interested in the technique of answering multiple choice questions. It might be more profitable to concentrate on the mighty Goodman (and Gilman).

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HIV and AIDS – Your Questions Answered, G. Barter, S. Barton and B. Gazzard. Pp. 196, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, New York, Tokyo, Melbourne, Madrid, 1993. Paperback, £11.95.

The chief appeal of this book is its easy to read style. Using a question and answer approach, the authors have