BOOK REVIEWS


This book is the expansion of a prize essay on the subject of obesity in childhood, with special reference to Hilde Bruch's theory on the causation of this condition.

Bruch supposed that an ambivalence exists in the attitudes of mothers to their obese children; that they have fundamentally hostile feelings compensated for by more obvious, but more superficial, over-protection and demonstrations of love, manifested by gifts of food.

The book makes a careful study of 185 obese children, analysing a variety of diet and comparing them with similar data from over 1,000 non-obese children. Dr. Quaade eventually comes to two principal conclusions. First, that almost nothing distinguishes obese children from their slimmer friends other than their fatness, together with a characteristic emotional outlook which is not causative but a result of the impact their obesity makes upon their school friends. He concludes that there is little support of Dr. Bruch's thesis regarding the relationship of parents to their obese children. Secondly, he concludes that the main reason why children become fat is because of their excessive appetites, though he bases his opinions on impressions only.

Dr. Quaade has nothing to offer regarding why some children's appetites lead them to eat more food and lay down more fat than others, and this surely is the crux of the problem which Dr. Bruch made an attempt to solve.

The book is well printed, and though paper backed, is adequately bound. It abounds in tables and charts, and is a useful summary, without making additions to our knowledge, of the statistical facts regarding obesity.


How far is adolescence the concern of the paediatrician? Designers of the earlier children's hospitals evidently considered that childhood ended when puberty began, and planned their wards and ages of admission to keep the pubescent child at bay. Nowadays many children's out-patient departments cooperate with the school medical service in seeing school pupils up to the age of compulsory school attendance, whilst there is strong evidence that each stage of development (including puberty) is being reached earlier than it was 50 or even 20 years ago. The trend has been for paediatricians to take an increasing interest not only in the behaviour problems of early puberty and the aberrations of certain diseases such as tuberculosis and diabetes which are characteristic of this phase of development, but also in the physiology of puberty itself. Dr. Tanner's monograph therefore comes at an opportune time. The author gathers together an immense amount of information from the widely-scattered literature, handles it critically, and presents it in a manner which is generally comprehensible to a reader without expert statistical knowledge. The text is well illustrated by line drawings prepared by Mr. R. H. Whitehouse, and by a number of half-tone plates.

Writing as a human biologist, Dr. Tanner has deliberately excluded from detailed consideration the aspects of adolescent behaviour which he regards as purely culture induced. He adopts Kuhlen's view that adolescence is not to be thought of as an unduly stressful period, but rather as one during which various adjustment problems have to be faced, which produce anxiety and stress. It may well seem to the less casuistic reader that this amounts to the same thing as regarding adolescence as an 'unduly stressful period', and that, since adolescence has inevitably to be experienced in a culture which demands a greater or less degree of control of adolescent drives, it is somewhat artificial in dealing with human material to distinguish between biological and culture-induced behaviour. Minor matters of opinion apart, however, there is no doubt that the author has admirably fulfilled his purpose, and provided a clearly-written and authoritative description of growth during adolescence, which is likely to become a standard text. It is addressed to medical students and their pre-clinical and clinical teachers (amongst others), and will be particularly valuable to those wishing to bridge the gap which commonly exists in the medical curriculum between embryology and the anatomy and physiology of the adult.


In contrast to the all-embracing character of Brock's work, reviewed above, this French work has a more modest range of activity yet contrives to deal with many unexpected aspects of paediatric physiology and biochemistry. Modes of investigation of prominent biochemical disorders are discussed and many technical methods are described in detail.

The authors have divided their book into two major parts. The first is concerned with chemical methods and their results, while the second considers such subjects as acid-base equilibrium, calcium/phosphorus metabolism, kidney and liver function and the endocrine glands, and there is a considerable section on blood coagulation and haemolysis. There is much to be commended in the authors' presentation, their clear descriptions and precise deductions. There are, however, many signs of hasty proof reading, e.g., goagulation for coagulation on p. 7, Chicago for Chicago on p. 55, and spesudo for pseudo on p. 195, mistakes which readily strike the insular English eye, and in any further edition of a book which might well find itself a permanent place in the French literature no doubt these more obvious errors will be corrected.

Incidentally, the cover of the book states that the authors are Colin and Polonovski, while the title page and publishers' note say that the authors are Polonovski and Colin; possibly in this manner honour is satisfied, but not in a way which will commend itself to the constructors of alphabetical indexes.