BOOK REVIEWS


This book, which is attractively produced in an effective combination of serif and sans-serif types, is designed as a paediatric handbook for students and practitioners. Although there are already enough full-scale textbooks of paediatrics, there is still a place for an introductory work of this nature. While many of the sections, such as those on fluid and electrolyte balance and on normal growth and development, are models of compression and lucidity, the quality of the work as a whole is uneven, and it contains many statements which will mislead the public to whom it is directed. The following are some of the detailed criticisms which occur to the reviewer.

Although it is stated that breast feeding is 'probably superior to artificial feeding', insufficient emphasis is given to the desirability of breast feeding from all aspects in the first three months of life.

The various syndromes of vitamin deficiency are succinctly described, but their rarity under normal conditions of care is not brought out clearly; and elsewhere, in a discussion of anorexia, a pusillanimous attitude to the effect of the popular press and of advertisements on the nervous parent is shown in a recommendation of vitamin therapy in the presence of this symptom for the purpose of allaying parental fear of vitamin deficiency.

When the routine immunization measures which should be carried out are outlined, the efficiency and safety of pertussis immunization is too lightly assumed.

Obesity is unjustifiably included among the minor psychiatric symptoms of childhood, and is described as being in almost all cases solely due to a pathologically high caloric intake; this well worn hypothesis has never fitted the facts and is misleading. The value of the section on disorders of speech, reading and hearing, appears to have been damaged by over-compression; even within the space allotted it could have been more informative. The chapter on treatment deals almost entirely with antibiotics and cortisone. Useful tables of drug dosage are given, and a quick reference table giving the emergency treatment of 25 types of poisoning is included.

Although the proper care of the newborn baby is well described, an astonishingly naive attitude to natural mother-baby relationships is shown when what is called 'the rooming-in plan' (in which the newborn baby is not kept apart from his mother in the first few days of life) is described as if it were a new and untried technique of no economic and as yet unproven psychological value.

In many places space has been well saved by giving aetologies in list form. Nevertheless an opportunity has been missed here of imparting valuable information without any expenditure of space, for these lists are not in any significant order, nor do they make any reference to the extent of our present ignorance of aetiology. For example, under the heading 'Congenital Disorders' it is not stated that we are quite ignorant of the aetiology of nine out of ten cases, and the first three causes listed are (1) infection during pregnancy, (2) poor maternal diet, and (3) maternal exposure to radiation. Exactly the same strictures apply to the paragraph on mental deficiency; and peptic ulcer heads the list of causes of melena.

The sections on prematurity, infection and upper respiratory infection are good, but there is no general account of the special nature of infection in the early weeks and months of life; and it is surprising to see that while the tuberculin patch test is described quite rightly as unreliable, no reference is made to the tuberculin jelly test which carefully performed gives results which correlate very closely with those of the 1/1,000 intradermal Mantoux test. The period of isolation of cases of poliomyelitis is admittedly arbitrary, but the minimum of one week here recommended is hardly safe. The statement that nasal drops are injurious to the mucous membrane if given for more than three to four days is not borne out by experience so far as aqueous drops are concerned and seems likely to encourage inadequate treatment of recurrent upper respiratory infections.

In the chapter on gastro-intestinal disease the periodic syndrome is dismissed more briefly than the importance of its differential diagnosis and management warrant in a six-line paragraph under the heading 'Cyclical Vomiting'; and the fluid intake recommended in the treatment of gastro-enteritis (2½ oz. per lb. body weight per day) is inadequate to allow for rehydration and for continued loss in the stools; nor is any specific reference made to the danger of rapid rehydration with potassium-deficient fluids. A list of seven liver function tests is not accompanied by any estimate of their value in infancy, which is low. The section on intestinal obstruction has been unbalanced by the omission of Hirschsprung's disease and fibrocystic disease of the pancreas as causes.

The chapter on 'allergic diseases' is commendably short, but nevertheless the value of allergic investigations and anti-allergic treatment is somewhat overstressed in relation to that of long term physical and psychological care, especially in the case of asthma.

This book in its present form could not be put unreservedly in the hands of students as a sound introduction to paediatrics, but fairly extensive revision could greatly improve its value.


After the recent appearance of two new textbooks from the Continent, new editions of established works from America, and smaller volumes of child health and disease in this country, it is a pleasure to welcome the fifth edition