BOOK REVIEWS


The advances in medical genetics in the past 10 years have made it necessary for Professor Lamy to write a new book rather than a third edition of his earlier book. Once again he has given an admirably clear and complete account of those aspects of human genetics which are of interest to the medical practitioner in little over 200 pages. In particular the mathematical side of the subject is simply and lucidly explained. Simple Mendelism, variability in gene manifestation, polyfactorial inheritance, mutation and eugenics are all discussed. There is also a chapter giving a brief panorama of the genetics of disease and, at the end, a brief account of statistics.

Anyone who has the courage to write a book on a subject which is at an early stage of development lays himself open to criticism. The chapter on mutation would be better perhaps earlier in the book and should have been given greater emphasis; it is the constant tendency of germ-plasm to deteriorate by mutation, at times producing a recognizable disease, at times perhaps a mere reduction in vitality, that makes human genetics more than an academic exercise. The old survey on which the gloomy prognosis for the children of cousin marriages is based should not have been quoted. Although no more acceptable survey is available, it is surely a matter of common experience that the proportion of defective children in such marriages is not as high as 30%. The English reader will be startled to see eugenics discussed in terms of sterilization and advice against marriage, with no mention of the more practical method of achieving differences in fertility by voluntary family planning. The graphs showing the effect produced on the frequency of dominant recessive disorders, if those who possessed them did not reproduce, are more useful if read backwards. If a disease is at all serious natural selection is already keeping its incidence somewhere near the limit set by the mutation rate. But read backwards the charts show the rate at which the disease will increase in frequency if natural selection is reduced by an effective treatment and no artificial selection is substituted; it is this aspect which will be important practically.

The references contain some surprising omissions, such as that of Dukes on the inheritance of multiple intestinal polyposis and of Fogh-Andersen on hare-lip and cleft palate.

These criticisms are, however, all on matters of opinion and emphasis rather than fact. Professor Lamy acknowledges his debt to the books of Roberts and Stern, but the medical practitioner who reads French fluently will probably find this book an easier introduction than any written in English.

When the book is reprinted the undue numbers of misprints should be corrected; besides the listed errata, these include two pedigrees printed upside down and a remarkable Teutonic spelling of the surname Fisher and the town of Shrewsbury.


Some of the chapters were written for a book by the late Professor Leveuf and had been approved by him, while his successor, Professor Févre has contributed the foreword. The book, therefore, gives an account of the practice of the infant surgical clinic of the Hôpital des Enfants Malades (Paris) and for that reason alone is worthy of study. In the introductory chapters the author discusses the pre- and post-operative care of the young infant and the methods of anaesthesia, and rightly emphasizes the need for the development of special centres for this type of surgery.

In the next section, under the heading 'asphyxial syndromes and disorders of deglutition', the author includes sections on oesophageal atresia and postero-lateral diaphragmatic hernia. The next section, on congenital occlusions of the alimentary tract, also follows the usual teaching of to-day. The classification of ano-rectal atresias and fistulae does not seem to be an improvement on that of Ladd and Gross, but the advocacy of the more frequent use of abdomino-perineal procedures conform with the views of many paediatric surgeons in this country.

The modern interest in hiatus hernia is shown by this section, occupying 28 pages in comparison with the eight pages allocated to pyloric stenosis.

In the treatment of acute intussusception, Duhamel prefers to employ barium enema under general anaesthesia, but he admits that proof of reduction cannot be obtained and, therefore, reduction is confirmed by a small incision in the right iliac fossa. It is illogical to compare the mortality rate of those reduced by enema and those reduced at operation when barium enema has already failed. It is unlikely that many British surgeons will be converted to this method of barium enema reduction, which failed in 60% of the patients treated by this means.

These are minor criticisms and the book should be of interest to all who are interested in the surgery of infancy because it is a frank account of the author's own experience as well as that of the clinics in which he works. Some