BOOK REVIEWS


Forty-nine years after the appearance of his first book and forty-seven years after the publication of his second, Dr. Nabarro’s long awaited third book Congenital Syphilis has at last appeared. It will receive a warm welcome from all students of congenital syphilis and will be an eye-opener for all those who have grown up in the penicillin era.

Dr. Nabarro’s experience was gained mainly as Director of the Venereal Diseases Clinic at The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, from 1917 to 1938. During this period some 1,000 cases of congenital syphilis were treated. Although this may not be a great number compared with what some other countries can assemble, it must be remembered that the staff of such a clinic was kept at a minimum and the Director of the Clinic thus would come in intimate and continuing contact with his patients. Against the background of this experience the story of congenital syphilis is told in all its aspects from the history, through the symptomatology, which naturally occupies the major part of the book, to treatment, while there is a short consideration of acquired syphilis in childhood.

To the many of us who have never seen a gumma and possibly but two or three cases of congenital syphilis in the last 10 years, the breadth of Dr. Nabarro’s subject will come as a stimulating reminder of the advances in prophylactic medicine in our time, and the older generation, versed in the different aspects of congenital syphilis, may well feel some nostalgia for the diagnostic fields that were; while the newer generation, obsessed with spikes, waves and milli-equivalents, may breathe a sigh of relief that here at least is one field on which they may pardonoably remain inexpert.

Some say that syphilis, and particularly in its congenital form, is a dying disease; if it is then Dr. Nabarro’s book will become a historical document in the English literature. He, however, expresses some doubt concerning the certainty of the rapid eradication of congenital syphilis in this country. For this reason he recommends that in spite of our apparent success in treating syphilis no treacherous feeling of smugness should be permitted, venereal diseases should continue to be properly taught in the undergraduate and postgraduate teaching hospitals, and that a proper look-out for syphilis should be maintained by clinicians.

With such a wealth of clinical material it is not surprising that Dr. Nabarro has developed certain interests within his subject and thus we find a very full consideration of congenital neurosyphilis as well as the relation of congenital syphilis to sundry other diseases such as herpes and parotitis. But the major value of the book is that it forms a historical record and will for a long time remain a yardstick whereby to measure the improvement in results of treatment of a disease which, mercifully, none of us in this country is ever likely to see as much as did Dr. Nabarro.


Into this relatively slender volume is packed a compound of lectures which first made up a 1952 post-graduate course in endocrinology and metabolic disease presented by the University of California Medical School. All but two of an imposing array of 30 participants are members of its teaching staff. As a chronicle of their outlook it has a significant place for the endocrinological devotee. But what of the editors’ claim to serve primarily the general physician, affording him a practical clinical guide to specialized territory in the throes of revolutionary expansion?

Even allowing for abrupt fluctuations in standards inevitable in a book of this make-up, one still feels that this admirable objective is too often overlain by the heavy therapeutic bias which has for so long plagued endocrinological progress. Too often, the elusive pearls of clinical guidance are also usurped by unwieldy classifications. In thus disposing of diagnosis in amenorrhoea, an exhortation to systemic thought is followed by shackling it to a classification taking up two pages. The injunction that diagnostic exclusion may begin either at top or bottom of this list does little to retrieve the doctor from a weary sojourn somewhere between pregnancy and true hermaphrodisitism. The classification introducing sex precocity even regenerates ancient confusions. For example, precocity is dubbed ‘true’ whether deriving from pineal, gonadal or adrenal tumours. Why obscure the elementary diagnostic distinction which depends upon the development of a true precocious puberty embodying gonadal maturation only in ‘cerebral’ cases?

Challenged by the editor’s invitation to paediatricians, we can at most concede that its paediatric perspective is less skimmed than is usual in most medical textbooks. We could expect to be less often disappointed when seeking paediatric details of presentation and management. Even failure in growth is viewed largely from the standpoint of adolescence. Exception may also be taken

472
to Professor Lisser’s sweeping advocacy of early androgenization for the small ‘delayed adolescent’. Surely a standardized pattern of strapping androgenic muscularity, with appropriated emotional drives, cannot be a compelling need for all small boys lagging behind pubertal schedules at 12 to 13 years. We also remain worried by the advice that even where the bone-age is normal, quite apart from basal metabolic rates and cholesterol levels, that ‘sluggishness, poor concentration, dry straight hair’ may, when linked to ‘mild growth retardation’ and other such non-specific criteria, justify a plunge into endocrine therapy, this time with thyroid of course. We already see thyroid too often stubbornly persisted with for years in vain wait for the ‘gratifying improvement’ offered here as the yardstick of diagnostic response.

The paediatrician is already better served in books entirely dedicated to his needs in this field. Nevertheless, there is much of lively interest to any physician in contributions of the calibre of that on calcium metabolism, or in the initial sections enunciating general principles. It is here that we especially welcome Lisser’s forthright call for a revival of basic clinical skills in balanced clinical approach to the patient as a whole, and Escamilla’s portrayal, in frank perspective, of the secondary role and fallibility therein of laboratory aids. These strike healthy reassuring chords in harmony with fundamental traditions of clinical teaching, still unashamedly nurtured here and there.


This beautifully produced book will very soon become a standard reference for all surgeons and paediatricians. It brings up to date the classic work of Ladd and Gross and at the same time widens its scope to include all conditions in childhood requiring surgical treatment.

In these days of anatomically limited specialization how refreshing it is to read a book written by one surgeon dealing in a masterly way with widely different conditions. A surgeon with the experience of Dr. Gross can afford to be dogmatic about the worth of different operations, and therein lies the value of this book. Descriptions of out-of-date methods have been avoided and the essentials compressed into what is still a very readable volume.

The illustrations are numerous and of a very high standard. The steps of the operative procedures are very clearly shown, and perhaps make the more complicated ones look too easy; surgeons with very little experience and imperfect technique might be encouraged to undertake operations beyond their scope.

The excellent chapter on pre-and post-operative treatment of young infants will be of great interest to paediatricians who care for such cases. The advice given is detailed and full of good illustrations on practical procedures.

Perhaps the greatest value of this excellent book will be for reference by those who are called to deal with a child with some rare condition amenable to surgery with which they are unacquainted.


It is a truism that specialties automatically divide themselves into sub-specialities and at first sight this work of Dr. Schaffler would appear to be one of the minuter of such sub-specialities, whether of paediatrics or gynaecology being debatable; but by the time this book has been read little doubt is left that the scope of the subject almost warrants the creation of a new specialty. The description of methods of investigation of the female genitalia, treatment of vaginitis, disorders encountered during adolescence, the surgery of the pelvic contents, with which are included some considerations of the lower gut and rectum, and medico-legal problems combine with short accounts of enuresis and such subjects as Wilms’ tumour to create a not inconsiderable subject matter. In some of the more specialized aspects of his subject Dr. Schaffler has enlisted the help of collaborators but throughout the book it is clear that these have been prepared to subordinate their individualities to that of the senior author; the result is a homogeneous whole.

Most of the subject matter is based on what is evidently a wide personal experience and there is little of it with which the average British paediatrician will disagree except in such minor points as the treatment of enuresis where such disagreement is only right and traditional. Particularly helpful are the methods of clinical investigation and the treatment of vulvovaginitis, while the illustrations are at all times clear and contributory.

In spite of its apparently limited appeal this book can be commended with confidence not only to paediatricians but to all clinicians whose work involves the treatment of little girls’ pelvic organs, and the reader will find a fairly definite but not unduly dogmatic view expressed on almost any problem in this field on which he seeks guidance.


Dr. Bundesen is President of the Board of Health of Chicago and well known for his organization of the care of premature infants in that city. In the present pamphlet—an enlarged version of a communication read before the Section of Paediatrics of the American Medical Association, at its one hundred and second annual session—he attacks a ‘long neglected field of infant mortality’, namely those deaths among infants of lower birth weight in the early days of life. His thesis is that all concerned must concentrate on the fact that more deaths occur in the first three days of life than in the whole of the rest of the first year. This is an elaboration of what Clement Smith has called ‘the valley of the shadow of birth’, and it offers great scope. In particular what Dr. Bundesen calls ‘abnormal pulmonary ventilation’ requires better efforts to prevent a fatal issue.