BOOK REVIEWS

A Thousand Families in Newcastle upon Tyne. By James Spence, W. S. Walton, F. J. W. Miller and S. D. M. Court. (Pp. 217; illustrated; 10s. 6d.)*

Many people have been eagerly awaiting this book. Its easy reading, absorbing interest, novel ideas and robust opinions leave us in no doubt that the hand and mind of Spence has written, and tragically moved on. His friends and colleagues in Newcastle have seen to it that the essential and urgent needs encompassed in an advancing world of paediatrics are appropriately discussed and summarized around the factual evidence of the health and illness of the children in the first year of life in the thousand families studied.

Every aspect of the impact of environment, both domiciliary and hospital, is considered in relation to type of illness, length and severity of illness, and consequential matters. Prejudice and bias are singularly lacking, so that there is nothing in the book that is not, in one way or another, quite important. Many paediatricians and health workers must have had similar though perhaps more fugitive ideas, but here, for the first time, these notions and suggestions are clearly in print for all to see and to absorb.

Child health is an expanding subject: there are no limiting factors, because each and every day has an effect for good, or not so good, on the rising generation. The home, the school, and the street are involved in these affairs of physical and mental health and not least in the early years. The reasons for the more recent improvements in child health are critically considered, and a correct weight is given to a widening public awareness of better housing, educational aspects of good work in the infant welfare services, and particularly care and common sense inherent in the mothers who listen attentively to good sound advice, in plain English, when it is given by really well informed medical practitioners or social workers.

Special mention is made of improved university teaching on the wider aspects of health and disease in early life, but that much is yet to be done to bring home the real and effective factors in prevention. A more realistic education for undergraduates and graduates is advocated.

This book is really a global study of medicine as it should be taught and practised. The family doctor will quickly appreciate that his place in the medical hierarchy should be second to none, but it will be all the more effective by building up on the ideas so clearly stated by Spence and his colleagues, not least in realizing the urgent need to work with and for the real family and public health.

Much of the present fragmentation of medical effort could and should be gathered up, so that in each local area of appropriate size all the clinical and administrative services should be well aware of what each is doing. Nowadays, excessive overlap or duplication is too expensive. The factors toward health can be economically encouraged, but only by team work and a real understanding of the fundamental factors concerned.

The story contained in A Thousand Families illuminates all this, in revealing the past, vivid contrast to the present, and for sound guidance of us all in the future. It was a happy thought to include the group photograph in which the late Sir James Spence is seen as the vivid mentor of the energetic team responsible for this record of domiciliary research.


This interesting volume has been produced as a tribute by his colleagues and friends to Professor Freudenberg on his 70th birthday. Professor Freudenberg came to Basle from Marburg in Germany in 1938 and has 141 publications to his name, mainly on subjects related to the physiological chemistry of infants. The book is a remarkable tribute to 'a scientist who throughout his life has worked for the synthesis of laboratory, clinic and practice'.

The contributors to this 800-page book number over 120 and are drawn from Europe, where Swiss writers naturally predominate, and the U.S.A. Professor McCance and Dr. Widdowson are the only British contributors with an article on 'The Effect of Birth on Renal Function'. All the articles are short and written in either German, French or English with translated summaries. Each author writes on a subject in which he is an expert and the book covers most of the field of topical and current paediatrics. Many of the articles are illustrated. It is proposed to publish further volumes under the same title in due course.

Amongst the distinguished list of contributors may be cited Clement Smith on 'Perinatal Mortality', Lelong and Le Tan Vinh on 'Pneumocystis', Wilkins et al. on 'Treatment of Virilising Adrenal Hyperplasia', Fanconi on 'Neuroallergie', Debré on 'La Maladie des Griffes de Chat', Wallgren on 'Complications of Primary Tuberculosis' and van Creveld on 'Recent Advances in Haemorrhagic Disorders'.

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