BOOK REVIEWS

believes that child mortality can be a sensitive indication of health conditions, especially to the social and economic backgrounds. The overall picture may give the impression 'that a dream of social paediatrics is being realised'.

The reductions of the male birth surplus by neonatal death are gradually being countered and the effects also in the pre-school age group are such as will enable the male surplus to change only a little. From 1 to 4 years of age the child's chance of dying becomes less as his age increases. However, the death rate of the 1 to 4-year-olds is still as high as that of the 35 to 40-year-olds. The higher mortality due to accidents is the main cause of the persistence of an excess mortality of boys.

Seasonal factors in the mortality are evident. In general, winter adds to the stresses and strains. The complex factors causing decline of mortality has a greater effect in summer. There is a slightly higher mortality rate in rural areas than in towns. Some emphasis is laid upon the state of health of the child before the fatal illness as a significant determinant of the end. This was especially noted in undeveloped areas.

In the figures given, the remarkably favourable trend in tuberculosis is clear, but the sad story concerning violent death, especially since 1950, is related. By comparison, Canada seems a dangerous place for pre-school children (30 deaths per 100,000), in the Netherlands 45, and in England and Wales 24; in 1950 in West Germany 59, in Norway 52, in Australia 38; in France 33, in U.S.A. 38.

The situation is, therefore, fairly general in its contribution to pre-school deaths.

The author draws a conclusion that the mortality due to road accidents in pre-school children proves to be not directly dependent on the intensity of traffic, but rather on the care and supervision in the family and in general on the related social and hygienic conditions. Deaths from poisoning add to the violent deaths in similar manner. Accident-proneness is considered in relation to the possibilities of the child's individual psychic structure; but little is really known about this. It does suggest any campaign against accidents is of a medical character.

Mortality from tumours remains steady, but there is a slightly increasing figure for the reticuloses.

It is noted that Holland is still troubled with fatal diphtheria in the pre-school age group. Child mortality (age 1-4) in the period 1900-50 fell by 90% in Netherlands, 92% in Sweden, 93% in England, 85% in France. In other words, the author would have us note that the pre-school age mortality is an even more sensitive criterion of social and hygienic conditions than the infant mortality, and that this decline started earlier than the fall in infant mortality and that the pre-school age mortality showed higher peaks during the war years.

Dr. van Gelderen is optimistic: the expectation is warranted that within 15 years the pre-school mortality will decrease to less than 1 per 1,000, or nearly half the present. Then, he states, accidents, congenital defects, neoplasms and reticuloses will account for 75%. Perhaps new discoveries and a betterment of the accident rate will even improve upon this hopeful expectation.

This volume is very readable and has a comprehensive bibliography.


This is a report, published by the Commonwealth Fund, of an important investigation of nearly a thousand 'perinatal' deaths by a sub-committee of the committee on public health relations of the New York Academy of Medicine. The study, which began in 1950, has produced a large number of interesting figures which have been analysed and commented on by Dr. Schuyler G. Kohl. The most arresting findings are that 35% of the deaths were considered to be preventable and that 40% of the deaths associated with Caesarean section could have been prevented by wiser use of the procedure. The more experienced the medical officer in charge and the better the general quality of the hospital work the less were the number of preventable deaths. Paediatricians, obstetricians and midwives will find much in this book to encourage them to better work.


This work covers a field in which there has not been any adequate previous attempt at complete summation of the available mass of published material. The authors have drawn on world sources, published up to and including 1954, as well as on their own considerable experience, and critically review the knowledge available on each disease entity. The introductory chapters on the nature of viruses and rickettsiae and on the diagnosis of diseases caused by these agents are full and instructive, though necessarily greatly condensed. Though no details of technique are given in a book which aims to instruct the clinician rather than the practising virologist, the tables of the methods for investigation of suspected virus infections in general and of each infection in particular are both clear and comprehensive. The mass of the book naturally is devoted to the clinical picture of the diseases affecting the skin and mucous membranes, and in every case theory and fact regarding the pathology and the treatment are critically and objectively examined. Where doubts exist the authors present all the generally accepted data, merely adding their considered personal opinions, and their presentation of the methods of therapy openly reflects the non-specific ways which must, for the moment, be followed by the clinician.

The text is beautifully illustrated, in colour wherever beneficial, and the style is pleasant and most readable. Folklore and literary illusions lighten the chapters and save the text from being a clear but dull scientific presentation of fact. The work must be a useful addition to the shelves and desks of all who deal with the virus and rickettsial diseases of the skin, eye and mucous membranes of man.