BOOK REVIEWS


Not to know of Thomas Phaire (as I did not) is to proclaim one's ignorance, but, by the same token, to declare one's gratitude to A. V. Neale and Hugh Wallis for this tardy introduction to him. Guthrie in A History of Medicine has a paragraph on Thomas Phaire, or Phayre, for Phaire, like Shakespeare, spelt his name according to his daily whim. Thomas Phaire was born in Norwich about the year 1510, 125 years before Thomas Browne settled there in practice and 154 years before Shakespeare was born. He lived at Kilgerran in Pembrokeshire and there died in 1560. He began to practise medicine at the age of 28, having previously studied law at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn. His book, which Neale and Wallis have edited, is the first English textbook on the diseases of children. It was published in 1545 as an addition to The Regiment of Life which Phaire had translated from a French version of Regimen Sanitatis Salerni. Guthrie quotes Aikin (1700) as stating that The Boke of Children was also translated from the French. This is an error which is sufficiently obvious from Phaire's preface to the book, although our editors do not contradict it. The book is Phaire's alone and its Englishness is everywhere apparent. The transcript is made from the 1553 edition, a copy of which is in the Medical Library of the University of Bristol—a book of 56 pages. The editors have retained both the antique spelling and the printing, except for the substitution of the modern 's', which makes for easier reading. In his preface Phaire states his purpose: 'to doo theym good that have moste neede, that is to saye, children'. The rest of the preface is occupied with a defence of the distribution of such works in English, 'to them that are unlearned'; we can judge how far Phaire was before his time when we recall that Heberden, ultimus Romanorum, more than 200 years later, thought that all medical treatises should be written in Latin. The editors have removed all labour from our pleasure by providing an erudite glossary and medica medica. How many readers will know, or can guess, the modern English for 'kybes', 'pushes', 'yeaxing', 'sege' and 'cony'?

All paediatricians should read this little book for the acuteness of its observation, the charm of its old English, its physicianly sympathy for the helpless and the knowledge which it provides of the diseases of children 400 years ago. One quotation only, from this most quotable of books, must suffice: 'the best and moste sure helpe in this case (smal pockes and measles) is not to meddle with anye kynde of medicines, but to let nature worke her operació'.


This year's Year Book of Pediatrics is rather less parochial than most of its forerunners, more than a third of its abstracts dealing with the non-American literature. The result is that the reader obtains a far more comprehensive picture of what is going on in paediatrics.

The book follows the usual pattern, with abstracts of varying lengths frequently being followed by comments from selected critics. The Editor acknowledges in his preface that this sort of one-way correspondence column is unsatisfactory to the author of a reviewed article who is unable to defend himself from what sometimes seems to be carping criticism, but it is clear that a book appearing once a year cannot publish an interchange of correspondence. Whether or not the valuable and well-selected abstracts which the Year Book of Pediatrics brings before us would be better left uncluttered by comment is a matter of sharply divided opinion, but if A is to be allowed to have an unanswered fling at B in one year it would be equitable if B were allowed similarly to criticize something of A's in the following year. As paediatricians, one of our duties is to convince the young of the essential unfairness of life, and we could well cite the practice of the Year Book of Pediatrics in our support.


This nice book is divided into general considerations, clinical considerations and public health considerations, and includes an appendix of various tables and methods of measurement. The book is written with a proper regard to the increasing importance of prematurity as a cause of neonatal death and morbidity and much has been assembled that will be of interest to the family doctor as well as to the paediatrician.

The general and public health considerations deal essentially with the premature infant, but nearly 200 pages of the clinical section have little bearing on the premature infant particularly, and are better covered in the standard paediatric textbooks. The appendix contains a whole mass of useful information on many unexpectedly interesting facets of the care of premature infants and is well worthy of study.

The book is elegantly produced and for 63s. could scarcely be improved on.