

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Congenital Anomalies of the Viscera.** By J. L. BREMER. (Pp. ix+202; 98 figures. 40s.) Harvard University Press (London: Oxford University Press). 1957.

The author is breaking new ground in attempting to give in book form a reasoned explanation, based on the embryology of the parts, of congenital visceral anomalies. His intention is to supplement the knowledge of human development usually gained by a medical student, and to show how slight variations in the timing of events, or changes in the relative positions of structures, lead up to many of the congenital malformations found in paediatric practice. The author gives a clear, succinct, and, at times, a very revealing account of the normal events, although some of the generalizations necessary in such a summary will not be unequivocally accepted by all embryologists as valid for human development. The normal development of each organ or system is first reviewed before the anomalies of that part are discussed. In this way the reader can readily follow the significance of variations from normal developmental sequences. Anomalies of the brain and spinal cord are omitted, except in so far as they are associated with anomalies of other viscera, as forming too vast a subject for a book of this compass. The face, the respiratory and the alimentary systems are dealt with in the first five chapters; the urinary system and suprarenals, and the male and female genital apparatus in the next two; while the heart and great vessels are considered in the four remaining chapters. The only serious omission of a common anomaly noted is that in which the apex of the developing lung is split by the right common cardinal vein, to give rise to the 'lobe of the azygos vein' in the fully formed state. It is surprising to find the statement (p. 55) that Hirschsprung's disease 'is due to no intrinsic maldevelopment or disease of the colon itself, but to a malfunctioning or stenosis' of the bowel below the dilated portion. Bodian, Stephens and Ward (1949) clearly demonstrated that a congenital absence of ganglion cells from the intramural plexuses of the narrowed distal colon is the underlying cause of the malfunctioning of the bowel in this condition.

The emphasis on alimentary and cardiovascular anomalies produces a certain imbalance in the book. The work of Barr and subsequent investigators on the sex chromatin of the female cell nucleus, and the fascinating problems of intersexuality have not been discussed. In view of the present very great interest in anomalies of the sex organs, and of the associated hormonal and chromosomal derangements, this is greatly to be regretted. These remarks are not intended in any way to detract from the many and brilliant explanations of visceral abnormality based on the logical follow-up of slight variations in the normal mechanics of development. Rather it is a matter of regret that an author, so well

equipped to deal with the variations of human development, has failed in some degree to give an adequate lead in suggesting possible fundamental causal mechanisms for structural defects, or to integrate the newer knowledge of biochemical and hormonal factors which influence growth mechanisms, into the fabric of the book.

The book as a whole is beautifully set out and a pleasure to read, so that misprints, when they occur, are all the more noticeable. 'Sphincter', for example, is misspelt twice (pp. 121, 123), and 'patten' becomes 'pattern' (Fig. 12). It is inferred (Fig. 89) that rats remain in the embryonic condition for seven weeks, although the gestation period for these animals is only three weeks. Apart from such relatively unimportant faults as these, the book is to be highly commended to all seeking a clear account of the embryological basis of congenital visceral anomalies.

Bodian, M., Stephens, F. D. and Ward, B. C. H. (1949). *Lancet*, 1, 6.

**The Mentally Ill Child: A Guide for Parents.** By STEVEN B. GETZ and ELIZABETH LODGE REES. (Pp. xiv+88. 25s.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications; Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas. 1957.

A book of this kind was certainly needed, for the problem of the mentally ill or psychotic child is still very imperfectly understood. It is important that those in administrative charge of children, school medical officers, doctors in infant welfare clinics, and so on, should be able to distinguish psychosis from mental defect.

This book, however, is written for parents, and for American parents at that. For the English parent inevitably much of the information about certification and placement is inappropriate to this country. A worse fault is that the book contrives to leave a confused effect; the description of the child could have given some explanation of his needs, rather than describing them in a catalogue, and the very difficult problem of relationships within the family containing a mentally ill child is discussed at a quite superficial level.

The bibliography, of 10½ pages, is a full one (with a few rather surprising omissions), but is mainly a bibliography for the professional reader. It would certainly startle a conscientious parent who embarked on it.

It is to be hoped that the success of the parents' association for children of this kind, which has been formed in America, may lead to something similar in this country. For these are children for whom administrative provisions are woefully inadequate, and who are often too sick to remain at home, too disturbed for the child guidance clinic and who tend to be relegated to occupation centres and hospitals for the mentally defective because no other provision is possible.