BOOK REVIEWS


This new book is designed for the senior student and family doctor and it is intended as an introduction to paediatrics.

There are three sections—from conception to 4 weeks of age, from 4 weeks to 2 years and from 2 years to puberty—and in each section both normal child care and children’s diseases are considered. The subdivision into age groups thus clearly segregates neonatal paediatrics from, for example, the school health service, or prematurity from tuberculosis. The different subjects are discussed in a down-to-earth manner and the writing is in the first person; this, combined with the fact that there are no references to distract the attention, gives a comfortably familiar style to the prose.

This book truly is an introduction to paediatrics and above all to paediatrics for the family doctor. It makes no excursions into controversy, it seeks no great scientific heights, nor is any subject dealt with very exhaustively. These are not the avowed purposes of the book, which is to act as a first presentation of paediatrics and in this object it can fairly be said to be successful. Throughout the text there is an abundance of sound commonsense views, sometimes expressed didactically, sometimes a little tenuously. The lack of an index will detract from its usefulness as a book to be consulted. For anyone about to start a study of paediatrics it can be wholeheartedly recommended as an introduction to what paediatrics is about. It is not a long book and every medical student starting his paediatric clerkship would benefit enormously if he were sent away for two or three days to read ‘A Primer of Paediatrics’ as though it were a novel. The text, which reads very easily, would make this a pleasure as well as instructive and would give a conception of paediatrics which no other book at present available is capable of doing.


This book, according to the author, was originally intended to deal with diabetes in children, but it has been enlarged to embrace a presentation of the fundamental alterations in metabolism which occur in diabetes mellitus.

The first part is entitled ‘Biochemical and Hormonal Aspects’, and in the six chapters devoted to this section an attempt has been made to bring together a comprehensive survey of the main knowledge on carbohydrate metabolism and of the factors which affect it—hormonal, dietetic and experimental. The task the author has set himself is a very ambitious one and to condense all the relevant information into six chapters has necessitated a degree of condensing which makes it very hard reading. He includes, however, a considerable amount of literature for those who wish to go further into the matter.

The next part deals with ‘Manifestations, Diagnosis and Therapy’ and here the author varies between recounting the experiences gained from his own clinic and that culled from the enormous literature already existing on diabetes. The first chapters of this, on incidence, type of onset, heredity, the methods to be adopted in making the diagnosis, etc., are excellent. The following chapters, however, to some extent go over the same ground as has already been covered in Part 1 and he again discusses the question of how insulin acts, what happens when glucose is given, the effects of glucagon, epinephrine, etc., and he feels that these chapters could have been very much shortened with considerable advantage. When dealing with the actual therapy, the author attempts to adopt a mid-way position between the ultra-strict school of treatment and those who allegedly adopt a ‘laissez faire’ method of treatment. The reviewer found it rather difficult to appreciate exactly where the author stood in this matter. However, it is quite obvious that it is impossible to write a description of a therapy which has to vary with each patient, and it is probable that many apparent differences between different methods of treatment are largely non-existent in actual fact. He finishes this section with a chapter on the regulation of hydrogen ion concentration of body fluids, which seems quite out of place.

Part 3, entitled ‘Developmental Aspects and Complications’, merely continues the story of the treatment of diabetes. The first chapter deals with such matters as diabetic acidosis and coma and the various factors that cause them, the symptomatology and a theoretical discussion of the methods of treatment. The next chapter once again discusses the various factors, such as the metabolism of sugar which may lead to ketosis, and for a third time discusses the adreno-cortical system, electrolytes, pH, etc. It is only in the following chapter that the actual treatment is dealt with. Again in these three chapters, there is considerable repetition of previous work and in the reviewer’s opinion, they could well be condensed into one chapter.

The next two chapters deal with somatic growth and development of the juvenile diabetic—personality, emotions and scholastic performance, etc. These are unfortunately relatively short chapters and the reviewer would have liked to have had a rather fuller account of the author’s own experiences in his clinic as well as the well-documented summaries that he gives of the literature. The next chapter deals with the vascular, ocular and renal changes and only 13 pages are devoted to this in a book which contains nearly 500 pages. As this particular problem is the one which looms most menacingly over the adolescent diabetic, it is disappointing that a much fuller treatment of this subject is not given.

The final chapters deal with the gastro-intestinal tract and liver, fertility and pregnancy, and a final short one on
neuropathy, insulinogenic lipodystrophy and necrobiotic lipoidica in diabetics.

In the reviewer's opinion, the very praiseworthy attempt of the author to combine the physiological, experimental and clinical approaches to diabetes into one book has been only a partial success. It has made the book rather difficult to read, and for those who are rather more interested in the clinical aspects of diabetes in children, much of the book is unrewarding. The clinical sections of the book are somewhat uneven, but on the whole are good, and one of the best aspects of this book is the excellent bibliographies which are given at the end of each chapter. The book is well presented and there are only a few typographical errors. There is an excellent table of contents and a good index.


This book, first published in 1950, was quickly and universally recognized as a classic text. Endocrine disorders, apart from cretinism and diabetes, are rare in childhood and only a specialist working in a great city with the resources of a famous general hospital around him could have studied adequately the natural history of endocrine disease in childhood. When Lawson Wilkins started his endocrine clinic at the Harriet Lane Home nearly 20 years ago endocrinology was practically limited to observational records, and, as chemistry, physics and biology made their astonishing contributions, Wilkins was ready to apply these new methods to endocrine disease in childhood. In this second edition of his fine textbook he generously acknowledges the work of the 17 associates who have worked with him from 1938 until today. To read this list of distinguished names is to recognize how much fundamental work in endocrinology he has inspired and sponsored. Not included in the list of associates are Money and the two Hampsons, who at his instance, have made important psycho-sexual studies which are fully described in the new edition. Their fundamental conclusion is that the sex rearing (up to 2 years), and not gonadal, hormonal or chromosomal sex, determines the psycho-sexual orientation and that to change the sex of rearing is an invitation to disaster. In those fields in which the author is most interested this edition is not only up to the minute, but a little in advance of Greenwich mean time. It includes, for example, important discussions of the mental prognosis in hypothyroidism (Smith, D. W., Blizzard, R. M. and Wilkins, L., Pediatrics, 1957, 19, 1011) and the sex chromatin pattern in testicular disorders (Grumbach, M. D., Blanc, W. A. and Engle, E. T., J. clin. Endocrinol. Metab., 1957, 17, 703) which have just reached the library tables in this country.

This edition is larger by 140 pages than the first edition, but it retains the same splendid factual and pictorial quality. The chapter on diagnostic methods has been rewritten and is now a comprehensive summary of the available techniques, though English readers will regret that there is no mention of Norymberski's 17-keto genic assay which is still giving good service in laboratories here. Methods of investigation of thyroid function are excluded from this chapter and it might save space in future editions if the whole of this chapter were broken up and redistributed. There is some repetition of information; for example, the effect of A.C.T.H. on the output of steroids in adreno-cortical hyperplasia is given three times on pages 69, 305 and 333. With the multiplication of new methods there will be an opportunity in the next edition for a division of available diagnostic techniques into categories—essential, useful and research. There is no discussion as to whether 131 should be used in young children, a matter which has occupied British workers (Arch. Dis. Childh., 1956, 32, 166). The 80 pages devoted to the thyroid is the best account of thyroid disease in children in any textbook. The author gives good evidence for his belief that the mental and neurological deviations in cretinism are the direct result of thyroxine deficiency and not due to an associated congenital defect. In the treatment of thyrotoxicosis in childhood, preference is given to the use of anti-thyroid drugs rather than to surgery. Generous reference is made to papers by British authors (both in this section and throughout the book), but there is no mention of the observation of P. R. Evans (Pediatrics, 1952, 41, 706) on the vertebral changes in hypothyroidism. Paediatricians will turn eagerly to the account of adrenocortical hyperplasia, for most of the dramatic advances in this field have been the work of the author and his associates. In the maintenance treatment of congenital virilism the author recommends 25-75 mg. of intramuscular cortisone every third day and two to five DCA pellets of 125 mg. each by implant in the salt-losing type with the addition of 2 to 3 g. of sodium chloride daily. The need to watch height increments in these children as well as 17-keto steroid output is emphasized.

Dwarfism and the problems of disturbed growth are still in the observational stage, and they will remain static subjects until growth-hormone assays are possible in man, so there is little that is new to be related here. The author has retained the same height standards as in the first edition which, adapted from Engelbach's tables of 25 years ago, are now 1 to 3 in. below the 50 percentiles in children over the age of 5 years in the most recent and reliable surveys. The chapters on calcium and phosphorus metabolism and on carbohydrate metabolism have been largely rewritten and are now worthy of the rest of the work. All readers will be grateful for two lucid chapters on deficiencies and deviations of sexual development—a subject made more confusing by the method of chromosomal sexing devised by Barr. The genetic explanations of these disorders are not yet complete, but the author produces a series of satisfactory hypotheses which are consistent with the known facts.

This book is essential reading for paediatricians, for there is much information here collected which cannot easily be discovered elsewhere. Lawson Wilkins' work has added lustre to the great traditions of the Johns Hopkins Hospital.