BOOK REVIEWS


The seventy-sixth issue of the Medical Annual will be the last to bear the name of Sir Henry Tidy as medical editor, and the publisher’s note rightly deplores his departure and promises an appraisal of his work for the Annual next year.

Two major changes have been made. The alphabetical arrangement according to the title of the article had become clumsy and confusing, and a certain degree of grouping into sections has been introduced, which, the publishers maintain and the reviewer agrees, will make for ease of reference. The second innovation is a series of four special articles before the “Review of the year’s work” namely, Intersexuality; Wound infection in operating theatres; Dangers arising from the medical use of x-rays; and Changing emphasis in paediatrics.

These articles are presumably intended as general reviews on chosen subjects of very particular interest and should they be greatly appreciated, and as a result increase in number, it will, to some extent, change the nature of the Annual. They are, as they should be, of a high standard though the last, dealing largely with the changes that have come over the practice of paediatrics as a result of the rapid decline of mortality and morbidity in children, the growth of psychiatry and the infiltration of a more psychological outlook in hospitals, is light-weight stuff compared at least with the first two.

The section on paediatrics seems, to a paediatrician, disproportionately short; nine medical and five surgical pages in a 570-page book leaves little enough room to review even the 14 subjects discussed though these have been usefully chosen. However, subjects of paediatric interest are scattered throughout the Annual (‘paediatrics’ we are constantly saying, ‘is only general medicine for a special age group’) and one can read about polio vaccination, the treatment of obesity with a high fat diet, metabolic hypothyroidism, coarctation of the aorta, Hirschsprung’s disease and, in a particularly valuable article, rheumatoid arthritis. Here the discussion is of the relation of this condition to others such as disseminated lupus erythematosus and diffuse necrotizing polyarthritis, and of the dangers of hypercortinism, which may induce mesenchymal changes closely resembling either of these two conditions.

Finally, for light reading, there is an account (‘instructive’, says the Annual) in the section on the urogenital tract on the size of the male urethral meatus in the circumcised and uncircumcised. Apparently this is, on an average, smaller in circumcised adults, and the earlier circumcision is performed the smaller it is! Perhaps this stupendous bit of statistical research will initiate a swing against circumcision in the States similar to that which occurred in this country when the bottom dropped out of circumcision with the advent of the National Health Service.

The Annual ends with the Practitioner’s Index and Book of the Year.


This monograph contains a tremendous amount of factual material derived from a retrospective study of 111 enuretics treated at a psychiatric clinic in 1945 and a current study of 119 cases in 1952. On the clinical side the aspects studied included the history (85% primary, 15% acquired), sex differences, frequency, age of cessation, depth of sleep and association with emotional disturbances, speech disorders, masturbation, etc. Environmental factors reviewed included social grading, size of family and broken homes. The genetic/statistical section reveals how much work has been put into the study and how disappointingly indefinite have been the results. Many of the conclusions, which paediatricians experienced in the handling of such cases would accept without question, have not been statistically proven partly because of the ever present difficulty of separating heredity and environment and partly because enuretics form a heterogeneous group. Nevertheless, the author concludes that there is a group of genetically determined primary enuretics in whom the symptom may be suppressed by environmental harmony, and that the acquired cases may follow an environmental stimulus. He is on less sure ground when calculating the mode of inheritance but some evidence is given to show that the mechanism is one of simple dominance with incomplete penetrance, the latter probably being mainly influenced by external factors.

This monograph makes no claim to study treatment but a passing reference reveals that only 4-4% of the cases ceased to wet within six months after treatment, i.e. a therapeutic failure rate of 95-6%. It will be invaluable for anyone writing a paper on enuresis but almost valueless to anyone endeavouring to treat the individual case.


The fourth edition of Professor de Rudder’s by now well-known ‘aide’ to the diagnosis and treatment of medical and surgical emergencies in children has been somewhat expanded. While this increased covering of the subject must improve its value it is to be regretted that, from the point of view of the foreigner to German medicine, the table of drugs and their dosage is composed almost entirely of proprietary names which mean nothing to the reviewer.