BOOK REVIEWS


Here are two books on the care of the newborn from abroad: the first in German from Leipzig, and the second in English from Dublin. And they serve to remind one that traditions and customs play a large part in life, and what may be taken for granted in one place may seem very odd from another; also that different conditions of life often account for big differences in outlook.

Professor Peiper's book with 12 contributors is a rather brief straightforward textbook addressed, one would say, to aspiring paediatricians and senior students taking higher examinations. The quality of the contribution varies from excellent to very moderate indeed, and in some chapters there is a strong impression that the author is writing from the literature rather than from personal experience. Indeed, reference, and deference, to authors and publications are freely dispersed throughout the text. There are, however, good chapters on the general care of the newborn and also on staphylococcal infections, both by Dr. Hans-Christoph Hempel, on respiratory physiology and disturbances by Dr. Harald Thomas, and a particularly interesting chapter by Dr. Anne Marie Stieve on the neonatal manifestations of Listeriosis, an acute and subacute widely disseminated septicaemia condition giving rise to widespread granuloma-like lesions. The condition is due to a diphtheria-like organism now named listeria monocytogenes, and only very occasional cases have been reported outside Germany, including a few in this country, though there appears to have been a comparatively widespread outbreak in Leipzig, Halle, and one or two other neighbouring towns. The organism is endemic in some animals and occurs in adults, and it might well be that cases are occurring in this country and passing unrecognized.

The Irish book, with 20 of the 27 contributors coming from Dublin, has a parochial outlook of which even the authors seem to be aware. The editor in his preface, for instance, says to his prospective readers that he is 'aware that some of the methods advocated here are not universally accepted . . . but we think this better than trying to reach an agreed mean', and in another chapter almost apologizes for the exceedingly original and excellent idea of establishing a centre for the treatment of pyloric stenosis in a maternity hospital. In yet another chapter Dr. Collis says 'We do not presume to teach or even advise our colleagues who no doubt have evolved their own drill'; or again, on a chapter devoted to the prevention of tuberculosis (Dr. Dunlevy), 'We would particularly not wish to give advice, say, to the Tuberculosis Medical Officers of a large English city . . .'. This depressing tone might be becoming if this were a better book. But though a few of the chapters, on the care of the premature, for instance, by Dr. Collis and Dr. Moran, and on respiratory conditions by Dr. Brian McNicholl, and on vomiting, also by Dr. Collis, are good, the book, on the whole, is disappointing. It suffers from too many authors, many of them specialists in their own field but not apparently in neonatal practice, and in these chapters conditions are constantly being discussed which have little relevance to the neonatal situation. The chapter on the heart, for instance, contains Paul Wood's classification of congenital heart disease based on 900 cases, many of them adults, but only a few scrawny lines on cardiac failure, and nothing at all on how to manage an infant with severe cyanosis, anoxic attacks, impending or overt heart failure. Again, do molluscum contagiosum, urticaria pigmentosa (illustrated by the back view of a child well on in the toddler stage), or even infantile eczema, really occur in Dublin neonates? Chapter 14 gives adequate accounts of haemolytic disease and haemorrhagic disease of the newborn, but fails to discuss the basic considerations regarding red cell and haemoglobin formation in the foetus, about which so much of such interest has been published recently, and so is able to state that the anaemia of prematurity is caused by damage to blood forming organs consequent on infection, impaired liver function and 'the general state of immaturity of all blood forming tissue . . .'. The chapter on water-electrolyte metabolism does little to clarify a very difficult subject, defines milli-equivalent as 'the amount of acid or base which the ion is capable of neutralising', and prints a table (p. 54) of instructions in which '85 per cent. saline intravenously or subcutaneously' and '0·2 per cent. glucose in 0·45 per cent. saline' are advised for the treatment of salt loss; misprints, obviously, but not conducive to helping a puzzled student.

There is ample room for a good book on neonatal paediatrics, but what surely is needed is that each subject should be approached with the realization that most of the conditions will be specific for this age group, and all will need to be approached specifically from a strong, well informed, not only paediatric, but neonatal point of view.

In contrast, however, there is one gem in this collection of very semiprecious stones. Dr. McCance and Miss Widdowson have written a brief chapter on renal function in the newborn in lucid, simple and economical English. These two authors have illuminated an exceedingly difficult and still unclear subject and for this chapter only the book is perhaps worth the 30s. that it costs in this country.


The supplement for 1958 to this by now well-known textbook of children's diseases contains original articles on chemotherapy, behaviour disorders, urology, chromatography in clinical paediatrics and encephalography. There are also 33 pages of Noter-up, a section containing material which corrects, amplifies and expands the earlier volumes of text. The high standard set by
previous contributors is well maintained and the small volume is delightfully produced.

This is another in the series of monographs published by Georg Thieme, Stuttgart, and it maintains the standard commonly expected of their publications. The study is based on experience gained from 680 cases of tetany seen in the first medical and paediatric clinics of the university over a period of 12 years in postwar Vienna. It suggests an extraordinarily high incidence of the disease, even for Vienna which had earned the epithet ‘tetany city’ many years ago.

Unfortunately the author omits a statistical analysis of his material which might have provided a great deal of interesting information, in particular for the paediatrician. The rachitogenic form still ranks high in his account of tetany in childhood although Dr. Jesserer admits that it has lost somewhat in numerical significance. This is surprising as rickets and this type of tetany have practically disappeared in this country.

The classification of the tetany syndrome of the adult is also applied to the child with only minor variations. In the hypocalcaemic group are included the rachitogenic, enterogenous and hypoparathyroid forms as well as tetany complicating renal disease and following the administration of cation exchange resins. In the normocalcaemic group are listed idiopathic tetany, tetany resulting from organic brain lesions, hyperventilation, infections, poisonings and loss of chloride ions due to excessive vomiting.

A short chapter deals with tetany in the neonatal period.

Dr. Jesserer insists on limiting the term tetany to conditions presenting at one time or another the characteristic tetanic spasms as an expression of the increased neuromuscular irritability, and he separates an ‘idiopathic’ tetany from the symptomatic variations. Idiopathic tetany occurs in young adults or adolescents; the blood calcium is within normal range, and its pathogenesis is attributed to increased irritability of cerebral centres.

Reading of the book is made a little cumbersome through the interpolation of large numbers of case records, some of purely historical interest and taken from the earlier literature on the subject. Only a quarter of the book is devoted to tetany in the young—understandably, as the author is a physician with limited paediatric interests.

On the whole this is a good review of the subject and over 600 references provide the background.


The tenth volume of this series is perhaps topical in that two of the seven articles deal with psychological principles in paediatric practice and convulsive disorders in infants and children. Dr. Sabin’s review of the prevention of poliomyelitis by vaccination epitomises the problems and progress made in this subject but contains little for the up-to-date paediatrician. Papers on the treatment of tuberculosis, staphylococcal infections in nurseries and muscular disorders of childhood follow the usual lines, and there is a short but valuable section on the transfer of antibodies from mother to child from Vahlquist.

This annual, or nearly annual, collection of review articles by leading authorities serves a useful purpose in ensuring that the children’s doctor short of reading time can, with the minimum of study, keep himself aware of what and where the growing edge of paediatrics is, while the references following each paper enable him to look up in the original publications any points on which he needs further information.

Many of the juiciest subjects have already been dealt with in earlier volumes, and perhaps the time is nearing when some form of ‘Noter-up’ such as is produced by Gaisford and Lightwood for Paediatrics for the Practitioner will be desirable for Advances in Pediatrics. A growing point in paediatrics does not cease growth merely because a topical review article has been written about it, and the editor of Advances in Pediatrics must certainly be wondering when, in the light of very recent advances, he will have to commission articles on subjects already discussed in earlier volumes of the series.