BOOK REVIEWS


Accurate information concerning the natural history of disease is as elusive as it is important, for without this knowledge rational treatment can hardly be said to exist. In attempting to set down the story of atrial septal defect Dr. Davidsen has clarified the background against which the treatment of this anomaly must be set. Although most of the 225 paper-backed pages are taken up with the minutiae of a thorough, careful and painstaking study of 15% of the atrial septal defects in Denmark, being a series of 132 patients seen at the Rigs-hospitalet, Copenhagen, considerable space is devoted to an analysis of the 190 autopsy reports in the literature. These latter records are admittedly unrepresentative, but they are unique, as they antedate the era of operative treatment and from them the author has extracted an amazing amount of information. In 68 of the 132 patients of Copenhagen the diagnosis of heart disease was made before the age of 7 years. The subject is presented well in eight chapters with excellent summaries of each. From the gravity of the late prognosis in atrial septal defect, the author concludes that there are sufficient grounds for attempting an improvement in the prognosis by surgical treatment. Such treatment should be carried out before irreversible changes have occurred in the pulmonary vessels and cardiac valves. The scope of the book excludes the technique or results of operative treatment. In a chapter devoted to electro-cardiographic changes some reference might have been made to the value of the vector cardiogram. The reproduction of radiographs is good, and the diagrams and line drawings prepared by the author himself are commendable. Full references are given to the 347 publications quoted and the index is accurate if a trifle curtailed. Spelling mistakes are few for a book published in a language 'foreign' to author and printer, and the quality of print and paper is good.


This book is made up of a selection of 20 of the papers and lectures of James Spence, edited anonymously by his friends and colleagues. They are divided into sections entitled 'The Nature of Disease', 'The Study of Disease', 'Children and Families', 'The Care of the Child', and 'The Practice of Medicine' and the 'Training of Doctors'. The first of these sections shows the young Spence writing papers on pernicious anaemia, xerophthalmia, epithuberculosis and other medical subjects of current interest in the era 1920-1933. These probably differ little from similar papers written by others at the time, but in 1934 there was published an 'Investigation into the Health and Nutrition of Certain of the Children of Newcastle upon Tyne between the Ages of 1 and 5 Years'. This work, done at the time of the great depression, marked the beginning of Spence's long and fruitful collaboration with the Health Authority of his own city, which led on to the unique 1,000 family survey, launched before his death and carried on afterwards by his collaborators. From this time, as his bibliography shows, he became less interested in clinical medicine itself, in so far as it concerns itself with particular diseases, and more and more interested in the way in which medicine should be studied and should be taught.

In turn this led on to the main concern of the latter years of his life, the institutions which men create to fulfil particular needs, and the manner in which these institutions evolve, or fail to evolve, as those needs change. He liked to regard the human family as the oldest of its institutions, and his masterly discourse on 'The Purpose of the Family' should be read in this context. His membership of the University Grants Committee brought him into close contact with the university and the teaching hospital qua institutions, and during the last decade of his life his interest, his talk and his energies were increasingly taken up with university policy. Unfortunately he wrote little on this subject.

The book ends with his address to the Newcastle and Northern Counties Medical Society, given a few months before his death in 1954. He spoke on Institutional Medicine, and the opening words are beautifully characteristic of his style.

'It is, I think, one of the inherent peculiarities of an Englishman, and more particularly of a Northumbrian, that, if you scratch him he begins to brood over his institutions. And then from time to time he reforms them. He is, as it were, still in those tremendous years before and after 1688, when our revolution was settled more by sincerity of argument than by force of arms, and when there were men of the calibre of Halifax the Trimmer to hold the balance. Now, again, in this century we are in the midst of another revolution, which is shown in our concern about our institutions. If we have neither the vigour, which is an affair of the spirit, nor the means, which is an affair of the intelligence, to reform our institutions, it will be a matter of interest mainly to the historians of the future; but such a state of affairs will be cold comfort to those of us who believe that the excellence of a civilization is shown in the capacity of its citizens constantly to reform its institutions in order to meet its changing cultural needs. But change may be for the better or the worse, and in remembering this we should be guided by Burke's admonition, that "merely to innovate is not to reform".'

The style of his prepared utterances is terse, witty and embellished with apt references to the work and words of men, past and present, whom he admired. Discussion of the present and future is characteristically based on experience to be gained from a study of history,
for his historical sense was one of his outstanding intellectual qualities. Alas, his prepared speeches, vivid though they are to read, cannot give more than a faint impression of the unforgettable delight of his conversation, nor of the effect of his extempore contributions at conference or committee. Yet it was by these means that he mainly achieved the great influence he had on his contemporaries during his lifetime. His approach to life had much of the imaginativeness of the artist about it, so that his judgments seemed to be arrived at intuitively, and his opinions often enough had a touch of waywardness about them, leading to his being apt to take an entirely unexpected line on some controversial issue. Inevitably these aspects of his personality cannot be reflected in a book made up of his formal utterances.

Yet, happily, something of the charm of his personality, of the enchantment of his companionship, and of the impact which these made upon those who knew him is brought out in the excellent Memoir (in effect a short biography) which Sir John Charles has written for this book.

All must be grateful to those who have given us this book, for James Spence was one of the two or three men whose ideas have shaped paediatrics in this country since the War.


This is a work of multiple authorship in which 27 contributors, all from the United States, have cooperated. The editors state that it is 'the first comprehensive treatise devoted exclusively to the clinical aspects of cancer and allied diseases in children'. The list of contributors includes names that are well known outside the United States and all are workers of experience and authority.

The scope of the book is wide. Nearly every possible type of neoplasm that may afflict children is discussed. A liberal interpretation is given to the term 'allied diseases', a number of developmental anomalies being included which are allied to cancer only as possible problems in differential diagnosis. The principal interest of the book is surgical, although chapters are devoted to leukaemia and the 'reticuloendothelioses', which are mainly of medical interest. Some of the authors describe surgical techniques and many give details of radiotherapy. An interesting feature of many contributions is the evaluation of results of treatment culled from large series of cases in various important centres. Pathology is introduced only for the purpose of classification and to indicate the bearing of histological structure on the behaviour of tumours and consequently on treatment. No detailed pathological descriptions are given.

A few criticisms may be offered on pathological grounds. The controversial 'Ewing's tumour of bone' is accepted as a pathological entity and the frequency with which the syndrome is produced by secondary neuroblastoma is ignored. In Chapter 13 the author's attempt to resolve the existing terminological confusion between dermoid cysts and teratomata leaves the reader still confused. It is obvious that the term 'dermoid' is too widely applied. A new confusion is created by applying the term 'non-lipid reticuloendotheliosis' to Hand-Schüller-Christian disease in contrast to the diseases of Gaucher and Niemann-Pick, which are termed 'lipid reticuloendotheliosis'. If this terminology is unfortunate because Hand-Schüller-Christian disease has hitherto been known as lipid reticuloendotheliosis and Letterer-Siwe disease as non-lipid reticuloendotheliosis.

It is surprising that the treatment of neuroblastoma with vitamin B12 is dismissed in two brief sentences. In view of the encouraging results reported from Great Ormond Street Hospital, this merits more detailed consideration in a comprehensive book such as this.

The editing is good and little overlapping between contributors has been permitted. A few misprints and grammatical errors have escaped correction. The book is well produced and generously illustrated, especially with clinical photographs and radiographs. A copious bibliography is provided. The index is full but would be improved by the use of heavy type to indicate principal references among multiple entries.


This is a book about the mental development of children during the first five years of life. It is not concerned with physical growth nor does it trace the mental development in specific mental diseases. The title of the book could mislead the casual reader and has rather a dull, prosaic sound about it. Not so the text. In articles published in recent years Professor Illingworth has shown great skill in portraying the social and intellectual development of young children in words readily comprehensible to paediatricians, general practitioners and lay social workers alike. In this book he has excelled himself. This is a splendid simplification and condensation of the original studies of Gesell and others adapted by the author for day-to-day clinical use and widely modified by his own large experience in paediatric practice. The reader is usually given a clear expression of opinion and many illustrative case histories are recorded. There is a wealth of good, sound, practical advice and the text includes several specimen charts for recording developmental progress which can be applied without any specialized equipment or training. There is wise emphasis upon the value of personal history-taking by an experienced clinician, though not everyone would draw quite the same conclusions from the examples quoted. There is, perhaps necessarily, a good deal of repetition in the early chapters where norms of development are discussed in the text, then classified in tables by age and then again grouped in more complex tables. The perpetual problem of deciding what is 'normal' and when behaviour becomes 'abnormal' has often been ingeniously circumvented in this book by the device of having three standards: (1) Normal, (2) Variations from Normal; (3) Abnormal.