BOOK REVIEWS


The care of the premature has come of age; and who is more fitted than Dr. Corner who has mothered so many of these infants into maturity to give us the first British textbook on the subject. For, with five parts, 38 chapters, 555 pages and four appendices and launched with a foreword by Professor A. V. Neale, her close colleague at Bristol, Dr. Corner’s book has, indeed, all the trappings of a full-scale textbook. The five main parts deal successively with the definition, incidence, cause and prevention; diagnosis; care; disorders; and prognosis. Part I covers the incidence, causation and prevention of prematurity and contains an interesting discussion on the difficulties in finding suitable measurements either in terms of duration of pregnancy or of the infant itself, with which to define prematurity difficulties which are particularly obvious in undeveloped countries where birth weights are low. Part II on diagnosis, consists of 10 chapters on the physiology of the foetus, and baby, and of the change over to extra-uterine existence in relation particularly to the immature infant. Though Dr. Corner in her preface is almost hesitant over them, these chapters are, in fact, a real feature of the book and in them will be found, in highly condensed form, a summary of much of the present knowledge of the subject matter. Parts III, on care, and IV on disorders form the great bulk of the book. In them are described the general principles and the management of the well and ill premature infant, as well as the organization of premature care on a civic and a national scale. Dr. Corner was offered a unique opportunity at an early stage to build up the premature services for Bristol, and these sections are expressions of her own large experience and, indeed, of her personal contribution to paediatrics in this country. There are, in addition, two chapters, one on eye conditions by Dr. C. A. Brown, and the other on pathology of the premature by N. J. Brown which within the framework of Dr. Corner’s pattern are valuable contributions to the book.

Part V is a short section on the prognosis of prematurity, and the four appendices give details of medical procedures, nursing procedures, antibiotics in the premature infant and the composition of milks.

Dr. Corner’s style is gubernatrixial; that is, she is didactic and sure and economical in her writing, and her text is carefully paragraphed and also headed and subheaded in heavy type. It reads more like a synopsis than a textbook and everything is done to make assimilation easy. Yet it is, she admits in her preface, ‘written primarily for specialist paediatricians and obstetricians’ and indeed it is precisely what any paediatrician who runs a premature unit himself, or particularly who is setting out to build up paediatric services in a community, might like to have at his elbow as a book of reference and as ammunition to help him through committees. Dr. Corner has perfected a style which is extremely clear and easy to understand and she has, throughout her text, supported her own opinions and ideas by a great wealth of references. The result is a massive volume which is certain of immediate acceptance and of many fresh editions in the years to come.

Criticisms of so generous a book are perhaps churlish. There are certain sections which have no real relevance to prematurity, and English readers must continue to envy American textbooks particularly for the quality of paper and binding and for the profusion of appropriate photographs and illustrations. Here the paper and binding are cheap and illustrations, though of good quality, are desultory, as if picked up haphazardly to cheer the book up rather than as serious contributions to clarity and understanding. There is, for instance, the usual photograph of a mongol and of a mongol’s feet, of cleft palates and of manual expression of milk, and yet none of a host of interesting conditions which are not commonly seen and for which a photograph would clarify as nothing in the text could do. But these shortcomings are presumably related to costs of production and by standards of today this book at 105s. is good value.


If we follow Oscar Wilde’s advice and collect second editions we shall certainly include this one. It is addressed to parents but should be read and re-read by children’s nurses and health visitors and should not escape the notice of paediatricians and family doctors. Indeed the importance of this book lies in the fact that the every-day experiences and alarms of parents in bringing up children are not left to the cosy advice of the magazine column but taken seriously by a professor of paediatrics who for many years had made a special study of child development. Since, however, most husbands leave such matters to their wives it was wise of him to include his own, and reading between the lines, their three children in the venture. The new chapter on ‘Holidays’ is excellent. The chapter on ‘The young child at school’ deals with too big a subject in too short a space and in a society where education is so important and causes so much parental concern a companion book for families with schoolchildren would be welcome. Perhaps before long Professor and Mrs. Illingworth will feel they have the knowledge and the experience to write it.

The photographs are a delight though some make the same point twice; the illustrations are a matter of taste,