BOOK REVIEWS


The first edition of Dr. Potter’s book was in its time unique and is still every paediatrician’s textbook to foetal and neonatal pathology. Dr. Potter points out that during the 10 years since it was first published there has been an enormous growth in interest in the foetus and the infant, as well as much fresh knowledge and research in maternal health, placental function, intrauterine foetal growth and development, extrauterine pulmonary function and so on. Dr. Potter has, therefore, brought out a new and augmented edition based on the autopsy material from the Chicago Lying-In Hospital on ‘all products of conception from the pregnancies terminating under 20 weeks’ and on ‘almost 100 per cent of the fetuses dying subsequently’ during a period of 30 years, as well as on ‘over 8,000 complete autopsies plus several thousand more consisting of microscopic examination’ on infants from other hospitals. It also includes macroscopical and microscopical examination of all placentae over a three-year period (after which, Dr. Potter says, it was finally concluded that the importance of any further information gained was not commensurate with the labour involved).

The result is monumental. In spite of Dr. Potter’s claim that her book makes no attempt to be an encyclopaedic reference book and ‘represents principally the observations made in a single hospital, somewhat augmented by material from friends . . .’ it contains an enormous mass of detailed information on normal, and particularly on abnormal foetal and placental development, from the 11½-day blastocyst beautifully photographed on p. 4 through to the pathology of the infant up to 1 year of age.

The arrangement of the material has been carefully thought out so as to be most valuable, both to the clinician and to the pathologist. The first three chapters are concerned with early foetal development and with the placenta. Chapter 4 is devoted to abortions: chapter 5 to the causes of foetal and infant mortality, largely based on the statistical information derived from the material of the Chicago Lying-In Hospital. In chapter 6 the requirements and techniques of her meticulous post-mortem examinations are described. Then follow seven chapters on anoxia, birth trauma, infections, inborn errors, malformations, tumours and multiple pregnancies. The remaining two-thirds of the book deals with the material regionally, the heart, lungs, head, skeleton, etc., chapter by chapter. In each chapter one is given normal development, appearance and histology, followed by abnormalities and then diseased states.

The scope of this book is immense and it is difficult to pick out particular chapters for special mention. The section on anoxia and pulmonary conditions of the newborn contain much of Dr. Potter’s special contribution to medical knowledge, but almost any section seems equally interesting and informative. Perhaps the illustrations are the most phenomenal aspect of this book. There are more figures than there are pages and each figure may contain upward of four photographs, so that there are perhaps 1,500 separate plates consequently illustrating the text. These photographs are beautiful, at times dramatic and often horrifying; there can surely be no better collection of one-eyed, three-legged, two-headed and other monstrosities that adorn these pages.

Dr. Porter’s style is lucid and simple and there is never the slightest doubt regarding her sources. She uses ‘we’ and ‘I’ freely and with good authentic effect and she gives references when it seems necessary. The printing, reproduction and binding are irreproachable and the price fades into insignificance against the information, the education and interest, as well as the pleasure, this book provides.


This new German textbook of paediatrics, edited by Professors W. Keller and A. Wiskott, aims at bringing paediatrics right up to date for the German medical student, a task in which it eminently succeeds. Special attention is being paid to the preventive aspects of paediatrics and child health, starting with antenatal care of the mother and on through childhood to the difficulties of adolescence. The problem of accidents and poisoning with their social and legal implications figures more prominently than in most paediatric textbooks.

An innovation is the introduction of a chapter on foetal pathology including a brief discussion of experimental studies in animals. The detailed account of the rarer metabolic disorders, which far transgresses the scope of a student’s manual, has been included because in the editors’ opinion it illustrates modern medical thought and indicates the direction which paediatric research is taking. In this, as well as in many other