BOOK REVIEWS


This book reports on the proceedings of the third in a series of International Conferences on Nutrition which met at Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1960. It was sponsored by the Macy-Foundation and supported by the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Pan American Health Organization.

The Conference was planned to deal with the social and cultural factors in nutrition and food habits and was not at all concerned with the medical aspects of malnutrition, and only a little with the impact that landlords, land tenure or social systems make on the financial poverty of peoples. Those partaking were agriculturists, nutritionists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and educators, with but two paediatricians, and the discussions were broadly geared to three major themes: The customs and taboos that militate against the proper use of foodstuffs that are available in communities; the resistances that are set up by communities to changing food habits unless a tremendous amount of educational ground work is done not only with those that grow, market and prepare, but also those that eat unaccustomed foods; and thirdly, the role that the many varied disciplines should play in putting over programmes for the relief of malnutrition.

Part I deals with the aspects of malnutrition and food habits as seen first by the nutrition specialist, particularly in experimental areas such as Uganda, Southern India, Central America, Mexico and Indonesia, and secondly as seen by the social scientists and anthropologists in relation to cultural changes, the social psychology of food habits and the difference between undernourished groups of peoples and between the various individuals and numbers of groups. Part II is concerned with the measures needed for the relief of protein and calorie malnutrition as a world problem.

The difficulties that have to be faced in attempting to improve the nutritional status in underdeveloped countries are obviously immense, and some of these are illustrated by the following extracts:

'For a long time to come the child will not receive better treatment than any other member of the family.'

'Health is not something you can do to people; they have got to do it to themselves.'

'The introduction of a new food, unless it is carefully tailor-made for a special situation... usually carries with it some traditional resistance which will show up in various taboos, magical measures and inversions.'

'The enrichment of maize flour with chickpea has been tried. The whole pulse cannot be used because, as with other high protein supplements, ... even a small amount changes the physical characteristics of the tortilla flour.'

'It is possible to teach women that milk in bottles or dried milk in tins is a superior food for their children, but this advance may be swept away by a rumour that the milk is poisoned or will produce sterility or has been introduced for political motives.'

'There are at present neither textbooks nor training which will help him (the student) to recognize environmental conditions, social, cultural and economic, which cause the deficiency diseases or prevent the affected person from seeking advice early or which could establish prevention on a permanent basis.'

The editors are to be congratulated on having, from a welter of background papers and set contributions, chairman's remarks, discussion and back-chat, successfully managed to prune and tidy the sound results without losing the informality and personal flavour of the meeting. It may at times be uncertain who precisely has made some particular remark or contribution, but in a meeting of this nature this was seldom of great importance. It several times emerges that practising physicians and paediatricians are unsuitable, from training and outlook, to be good nutritionists and health educators, and this fascinating and very readable account of the Conference proceedings should be read by all doctors who wish to gain more than a narrow medical view of this, the world's most important problem next to the prevention of war.

The printing is excellent and the binding and paper are adequate, and though 20 shillings might seem a lot for a book of just over 200 pages, it is well worth buying.


This volume contains six papers reviewing the problem of maternal deprivation in the light of the research that has been carried out since the publication in 1951 of Bowlby's monograph 'Maternal Care and Mental Health'. There are contributions by psychiatrists, a