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 mitigate 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
cultural anthropologist and a writer on social science, thus ensuring that the field of research is surveyed in wide perspective. The recognition of the effects of maternal deprivation in infancy and early childhood has influenced the care of children who, for one reason or another, are deprived of a normal home life. Research during recent years has thrown a great deal of light on the nature of experiences that may lead to deprivation and give rise to adverse effects on a child's development. Lines of further research are indicated, but there is already evidence to show that the effects of deprivation experiences may be grave and that they may resist reversal. Therefore, this excellent volume should be most warmly recommended to all those who are concerned with the welfare of children.


This large volume results from the second annual series of workshop type conferences conducted by the Social Science Institute of the Washington University in St. Louis through its Community Mental Health Research training programme. The training programme takes its theme from the application of the social sciences to the study of community mental health. It is concerned with the applicability of the social sciences to the understanding of mental health phenomena and to the practice of preventive intervention into community processes.

The contributors to the volume are psychiatrists, social scientists and psychologists who attended the conference. The volume is divided into three sections, the first section contains reports of findings and interpretations of research relevant to maternal attitudes and child behaviour. The second section contains papers of impressions and comments concerning the current status of the research on parental attitudes and possible next steps in future research. The three contributors of this section have listened to the group discussions of the conference and recorded their impressions. The third section contains original papers, prepared after the conference, that are designed to contribute to the definition of the problems discussed.

Much of the first part is dead, paper and ink work difficult for a clinician to read or to be in sympathy with; it is lacking in dynamics. Dr. Anthony in his impressions in the second part refers to this—some of the mechanisms with which, as a psychoanalyst, he works daily were brought up, but were no longer recognizable by him, 'something had happened in the psychological processing (something that Freud had worried about in his lifetime—the technological impact on a system of ideas)'.

In the third section the most interesting paper was entitled the Unmeasured Residual in Current Research on Parental Attitudes and Child Behaviour by Lorene A. Stringer and David J. Pittman. The authors make the important point that one of the major determinants in parent-child relationship is the antecedent parent-child relationship.

A great deal of work has been done and laboriously recorded, and one feels that the participants must have mutually benefited by the bringing together of the various aspects of their work.


This book is an attempt at a comprehensive statement of what is known of the psychology of the first three years of life. The author’s outlook is influenced by the psychobiology of Henri Wallon. The result is successful as an intellectual exercise, and as such the book could be a public that is not attracted by writing that comes from the clinician who is involved in cases and who is liable to pass on to the reader some of the anxiety that belongs to the case load.

The various contributors to the theory of child development are given their respective places, including Piaget, Gesell, and Buhler. The Freudian or psychoanalytic is described, though inadequately. Those who read mostly in the English language can find the references to French analysts useful, and can be glad to be reminded generally of French authors whose writings in one way or another impinge on the theory of infant and child development.

The author's aim is to find a way of keeping in touch with the older work, to take into account what is being done now, and to some extent to look into the future. While this book, therefore, makes good reading for the scholar, as a description of ideas associated with specific authors, it seems to the reviewer to fail to describe the developing child. Does it perhaps fail to put the reader in touch with the dynamic unconscious, and with the warmth of the infant-mother relationship, and with the startling reality of infantile dependence?

A good feature is the psychobiological viewpoint from which the author never forgets that the child is a personality developing in a developing body.


This book is full of wisdom and is excellent value. It is written for parents; would that all parents had read it over together before the baby was born. Dr. Gibbens writes with sound sense on the choice of hospital or home for the birth; on the father's attitude to his wife during the pregnancy; on breast feeding and on bottle feeding; on development and, briefly, on illness. He writes reassuringly, knowing that often the mother who looks up a book is at that moment an anxious woman. Its sales are well into six figures; it deserves to be read by millions.