BOOK REVIEWS

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the book. Ready speakers may in the interval become unwilling authors. The scope of the papers, the selection of the authors and the nature of the contributions might probably have been quite different if the book had been planned as a series of monographs.

Although the editor of the present work has recognized these difficulties, and no doubt done his best to overcome them, they are apparent to some extent. The seven sections and 36 papers, written by 35 authors, deal with the pituitary, the thyroid, the parathyroids, the adrenals, the testes and the ovaries. There is much of interest in the book and the paediatrician who wants to discover what are the modern methods in the investigation of endocrine disorders that occur but rarely in his field, such as Cushing's syndrome or Addison's disease, will find much here that is helpful to him. But there is no indication of the changes in methods that are required when the investigations are to be applied in children. For example, the volume of water to be used in the water-load test for hydrocortisone deficiency is stated to be 1,500 ml., tout court.

There are four papers occupied with disorders presenting predominantly in childhood. One is concerned with calcium and phosphorus and the other with carbohydrate disorders. The space that is allotted to these subjects is small and the paediatrician will find them more fully dealt with in modern texts of paediatrics. Grumbach writes two good articles. One on abnormalities of sex differentiation and the other on sex chromatin, sex chromosomes and abnormalities. In the second paper he has an interesting theoretical discussion of the functions of the X chromosomes in the female. The one which is genetically active is isopyknotic (non-chromatin staining) and undergoes replication of DNA earlier; the second is heteropyknotic (chromatin staining) and undergoes replication later and the action of the genes on this chromosome is suppressed or inactivated. This difference in the two X chromosomes does not, he suggests, depend on their derivation, whether from mother or father, but is randomly fixed at an early stage of embryological development.

Our knowledge of human chromosomes has not yet reached drosophilic levels but we have come an astonishing distance in six years.


(Little Club Clinics in Developmental Medicine No. 10.) Edited by Ronald Mac Keith and Martin Bax. (Pp. 104; illustrated. 17s. 6d.) National Spastics Society Medical Education and Information Unit in association with Heinemann, London. 1963.

This small book forms a record of the International Study Group held at Oxford in 1962. The papers presented at the Conference by neurologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists and psychologists form the major part of the book, but reports of the group discussions are included and make a valuable section.

The term 'minimal cerebral damage' has been much used recently to group certain disorders of cerebral function in children, and it appears in the title of many papers here. However, the conference decided that the concept of minimal brain damage should be discarded. The majority were against these cases being put into one category, but were in favour of their separation from the general school population. These children require detailed study and diagnosis, and a large amount of research needs to be done in investigating the group. Some of the papers show how this is being attempted.

All workers who have to deal with behaviour problems and learning difficulties in children will find much food for thought in these pages. In addition they will get useful practical advice on, for example, the importance of recognizing minimal cerebral dysfunction in paediatric practice, the recognition of minor cerebral palsy syndromes, and the extent to which the child with 'minimal brain damage' should be investigated.

This handbook can be recommended as an up-to-date collection of information from several specialties about an important group of handicapped children.


This book is described in a preface as the first in France devoted to paediatric cardiology. It is intended for clinicians, and attempts to analyse cardiological problems from the point of view of the practitioner to whom the facilities of a cardiac unit are available.

The first chapters consist of a description of the modern methods of observing and recording the action of the heart. These chapters are set out with brevity and clarity, and are illustrated by good figures and tables. The radiographs in general, and the section on catheterization and angiography in particular, are admirable.

There follows a detailed section dealing with congenital heart conditions, and here again the subject matter is set out clearly, taking one lesion at a time, but pointing out the complications that may arise in interpreting results when more than one lesion is present. No attempt is made to deal with surgical treatment.

The chapter on rheumatic carditis is equally good, though it may be questioned whether the incidence in France is comparable to that in England in the past decade. This section is followed by consideration of arrhythmias and of heart conditions associated with the less common diseases. The general standard is high and is maintained throughout.

A few criticisms can be raised. It comes as strange to us that it is necessary to stress the inadequacy of auscultation by direct application of the ear to the chest wall, and to emphasize the necessity for a good stethoscope. In a modern book by countrymen of Laennec, this has a curious sound. Relating the position of the apex beat to the nipple, seems equally old-fashioned.

And to say that nothing was known of the aetiology of rheumatic carditis until 20 years ago scarcely does justice to British and American workers of the 1930's and earlier. Reference to heart lesions by initials, without
an adequate glossary is at times irritating. A fairly representative bibliography follows each chapter.

The book is excellently produced, and is to be commended.


For those who wish to keep up with the ions this is an excellent review of the commoner electrolyte disturbances in infancy. The presentation is orthodox and the references quoted, with the exception of the work of McCance and Kerpel-Fronius, are taken almost exclusively from American and French sources—probably a just enough distribution of credit.

The section on renal physiology seems a little inadequate as there is no discussion of the counter-current mechanism, though a diagram from one of Ullrich's papers is reproduced without comment in the text.

The structure of the book does not make for easy reading; there is much repetition and some of the most useful tables appear in the earlier chapters though they would be more useful in the sections on treatment. One has the impression that some of the material has not been properly digested, as on a number of occasions there are irritating changes from grams to milli-equivalents. Naturally one expects to find a different emphasis in a book from 'the Continent', but it is surprising to find that the authors apparently still depend upon venepuncture for their blood samples for routine blood chemistry. The special description accorded to the somewhat heroic subclavicular route for transfusion seems unjustifiable, particularly as the authors admit that they have had no personal experience of the technique.

There are of course omissions: one would have liked for example a more detailed treatment of water intoxication and of hydropsaline and hyperelectrolytaemia. Nevertheless, this is a book that can be recommended to anyone who has been able to overcome the linguistic inhibitions induced by an English schooling.


All who are interested in rheumatic fever, and particularly those who make dogmatic statements about its aetiology and management, should read this excellent book by May Wilson. It is a worthy successor to her former monograph which dealt with the period 1916 to 1940.

She discusses in a thoroughly scientific and detached manner the controversy about the aetiology, pathology, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of rheumatic fever. With regard to aetiology, she emphasizes the fact that it is certainly not due to the haemolytic streptococcus alone, but to an interaction of the streptococcus, malnutrition and poverty and unexplained genetically determined susceptibility to rheumatic fever, with stress (e.g. chilling or overfatigue) sometimes playing a part. She concludes: 'It must be acknowledged that the pathogenesis of rheumatic fever is obscure.'

There is a very sensible discussion of the use of prophylactic antibiotics. She concludes that adequate antibiotic treatment of haemolytic streptococcal infections is obviously indicated, but suggests that continuous prophylactic antibiotic treatment should be reserved for those with recurrent tonsillitis or poor social circumstances.

As for treatment of the attack, the reviewer was pleased to see that the author comes down unequivocally on the side of giving corticosteroids. For instance she wrote, 'our observations clearly demonstrated that in patients with progressive clinical symptoms of active carditis, adequate short-term therapy will terminate the inflammatory process, significantly shorten the duration, and prevent or minimize residual cardiac damage'. She is so convinced about the value of short-term corticosteroid therapy that she considers that a controlled study would be unethical.

She does not discuss another controversial matter, the duration of bed-rest, but one notes a passing remark that her children were ambulatory two to three weeks after the institution of corticosteroid therapy.

Dr. May Wilson deserves congratulations on an excellent and valuable book. It is brief, scientific, well written and to the point and it is easy to read.


This revised version of an old favourite should be useful to any expectant mother who wishes to know how to take care of herself during pregnancy, and how to prepare for the baby. It tells her clearly what is normal, what the likely complications are, when to consult her doctor and the reasons for antenatal examinations.

The advice on avoiding miscarriages in the first three months is not clear. It gives the impression that travelling by car is safe at this time, and does not warn against fatigue. The misleading impression is given that the onset of true labour pains is always accompanied by a 'show'. There is some old-fashioned advice, such as that on laxatives and constipation, or baby clothes; and in the preparation of the room for a home confinement, washing down walls with carbolic solution is surely out of date.

The sections on the essentials of training for childbirth and on the feeding and care of the baby are excellent.