BOOK REVIEWS

The Medical Care of Children: An attempt to relate the experience of a group of paediatricians to the needs of doctors in family practice. Edited by S. D. M. COURT. (Pp. xii + 294; 38 figures + 15 tables. 50s.) London: Oxford University Press. 1963.

This book was written by a group of paediatricians and physicians working in the north-east of England, from the same 'stable' that produced A Thousand Families in Newcastle upon Tyne. In his preface, Professor Court states that the book was designed specifically with the needs of the family doctor in mind; in fact, suggestions for the contents were supplied by a round dozen of them. It admirably fulfils this purpose. The book deals solely with the common disorders of children, as they present to, and are treated by, the general practitioner in the child's home. As such it is sure of a welcome. The majority of textbooks are written as though they were to be read by specialists—they contain far more than a general doctor can possibly retain about one branch of medicine. But no doctor can afford not to be thoroughly familiar with the subject matter of this book. There are two invaluable chapters, 'Everyday Questions', and 'Unexpected and Dangerous', which will be consulted daily—in fact, they had better be learned by heart!

The book has the unavoidable drawbacks of this plan. It is not a complete textbook (this is freely admitted in the preface), so that some subjects are not touched on, and treatment in hospital is barely mentioned. Similarly, there is hardly enough material presented to provide a basis for prognosis. So the book will not help the family doctor when he has to discuss these matters with the family, and often he is asked to do just that. Even within the limits he has set himself, I think Professor Court has been scrappy at times—two pages on infant feeding ('Am I Feeding the Baby Properly?') contrasts badly with nearly 11 on congenital heart disease, especially as he himself says 'We know that the number of infants with congenital heart disease seen by an individual family doctor will be small.'

The great virtue of the book, worthy of the highest praise, is the warm humanity that infuses it. The writers are continually aware of the child as a member of his family and of society, almost as a member of their own family. The sick child is never considered in isolation; he is merely the visible top of the iceberg—the family, his home, his school, these are the submerged factors that lift him up into our view. Most welcome, too, is the importance laid by Professor Court on education as a factor in child health.

The great bulk of the information and advice given is standard teaching; but I wish Professor Court had been more positive in advising exposure of young girls to rubella. And is it really true that the mortality of illnesses-with-fits is 20%? Each chapter ends with a valuable list of 'selected reading', and the book closes with five appendices of miscellaneous information and an index.

The volume is beautifully printed, and has several good illustrations and line drawings; but it is unexpec tedly heavy in the hand.


This volume is not the comprehensive review which its title might be thought to imply, but the Transactions, largely reproduced verbatim from tape-recordings, of the first Obstetrical Conference organized by the South-Western Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society. It maintains the challenge and interest of controversy and discussion to a much greater extent than is usual in the reports of such proceedings and is to be recommended as a model, both in planning and reporting, to prospective organizers of postgraduate symposia on obstetric and paediatric problems. The apparent conflict of interest between the various specialists and other workers in these overlapping fields is a still continuing problem. More can be achieved by one such informal interplay of ideas than a score of evidence-taking committees, and it is to be hoped that this conference and the book which records it will come to be looked on as prototypes.

As might be expected, the largest contribution is made by the obstetricians, but of equal value and interest is that made by the anaesthetists. The general practitioner is also well represented, both in the presentation of leading papers to take account of his point of view and in the contributions to the subsequent general discussions. Only one of the 15 papers is presented by a paediatrician, but this is of sufficient general interest to more than justify his inclusion in the title of the book.

All who are involved in the problems of perinatal