Our Blind Children, Growing and Learning with Them.


Having met the writer of this book on various occasions, and knowing of his international repute in the field of the education of blind children, one is privileged to have a preview of this second edition of Dr. Lowenfeld's book.

Throughout the whole of this work Dr. Lowenfeld has the sound educational approach to the blind child, in showing that though blind he is first and foremost a baby or a child. His analysis of early parental thoughts on the blind baby within the family will greatly assist such parents and his insistence on normalcy does not affect the awareness nor the unawareness that often accompany blindness both collectively and individually. His advice and guidance to parents of blind children are succinct and equally sound for all those who have to work with young blind children.

Dr. Lowenfeld has a wide knowledge of the problems of blindness and does not seek to hide them. He does, however, give advice and observations which help to modify these problems, and place them in their proper perspective. He avoids despair as he also avoids over-optimism, and his guidance will be of great value to parents and families who have a blind child.

In his references to the business of growing up, his understanding of children and of blind children is always evident. His suggestions on the need for factual demonstration replacing lack of sight, and for a blind child’s need for maximum opportunities for manipulation, adaptation, and touch discrimination, will be fully agreed and accepted by all who have experience in working with blind children. But with all the positive assertions that Dr. Lowenfeld so rightly illustrates in his book, he does not minimize the isolation and frustration that can loom so large in the life of the blind child or indeed, of any blind person: but he helps to lessen the isolation and frustration by his own deep psychology and experience of blind persons. At no time is this book dogmatic or dictatorial, though the author is always sure in his observations and advice. He wisely avoids too many definite conclusions, and constantly reminds his readers that the blind child is first and foremost an individual, so there can be no general classification of the effects of the blindness.

This book will be a direct help to many parents of blind children; it will be equally helpful to those who work with blind children in residential accommodation, public school classes, itinerant services, or in any other form of collective or individual work for children who are blind and need special educational facilities.

In recent years two methods have loomed large in the education of blind children—segregation and integration. In putting forward the pros and cons of present systems Dr. Lowenfeld has wisely steered a middle course in quoting "that each blind child should be educated according to his individual needs, and that not for a long, long time—if ever—will any of the three types of education listed above eliminate the other two". Time and again in his writings Dr. Lowenfeld returns to what may be called the time requirement of blindness. This is of vital importance in the education of blind children, and is something that must be faced by educationalists in evaluating educational programmes. In giving his own views on the experience and information necessary to all blind children, the author never overlooks the need of the blind child to have opportunity, time and guidance in learning, to encourage the child's development to his fullest potential.

This book confirms what many experienced teachers of blind children have felt and learned through their work with pre-school and school age blind children. Perhaps Dr. Lowenfeld was a little ambitious in his writing on the question of colour and light, with their meanings to the totally blind child. To the child who has enjoyed sight these things have positive meaning even when such meaning eventually comes only through memory because of total blindness. In the case of the child who is totally blind from birth, the interpretation and understanding of light and colour, particularly light, are hardly explained with certainty. I doubt if Dr. Lowenfeld himself is satisfied with these two pages of his book. In fact he passes the question back to others to a considerable degree by writing 'you yourselves will find some way in which you can explain them to your child.'

Our Blind Children, Growing and Learning with Them, is a valuable contribution to the literature on blindness and blind persons. It will certainly serve an important purpose in assisting many parents of blind children throughout the world; and will be of great value to all teachers of blind children and particularly in those areas of the world where such education and provisions are in their infancy.


Deafness in children is an important and topical subject and there has been a need for a guide on the subject for paediatricians and other doctors working with children. This little book goes far to supply this need and to that extent is very welcome. Furthermore, the length of the book is quite adequate without being too long to read in an evening, and the price is reasonable.

It is not in fact greatly concerned with research, apart from one section in which some suggestions are thrown out as to the more important aspects of deafness requiring exploration. A more serious criticism is that the title fails to disclose that most of this book is an almost verbatim account of a conference held in the Spring of 1963. Consequently, a great deal of it, especially in the first half, is subject to the comment recently made about another book, that to put it in print between hard covers was rather like preserving one's fingernail parings in a matchbox, and about as useful.
BOOK REVIEWS

This is certainly not true of the very professional and useful commentaries and contributions by the editor. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that he might be the author or at least the editor, with a few selected contributors, of a future book on deafness, and that that one will have the virtues of brevity and simplicity that this one possesses, but without the dead wood.

In the meantime, in spite of this criticism, most of us will find much of value in it and much to learn from the proceedings of this Oxford conference, with its variety of eminent participants. By the way, how quiet the teachers of the deaf seem to have been.


Once again the Spastics Society puts us in their debt by publishing this book, the 13th in the notable series of Clinics in Developmental Medicine (but it is a pity that the apt term Little Club Clinics has been dropped). This is a report of an international study group at Durham in the Autumn of 1963, which brought together audiologists, neurologists, phoneticians, psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, surgeons, linguists, speech therapists, and remedial teachers.

Papers are grouped under these titles: Normal Development and Background to Communication; Diagnosis; General Principles of Treatment; The Child with Mental Defect; The Non-communicating Child; Cerebral Palsy; Stammering. The subject matter is necessarily one where little solid fact of an anatomical or numerical kind is applicable, and perhaps because of this the papers make less immediate impact on the reader than they evidently did when delivered in their context at the opening of a discussion. One infers that the main achievement of the conference was to bring into sharper focus those aspects of the subject requiring particular study, and to underline the necessity for a team approach (exemplified by this study group) to the usually complex problems of the speechless child.

Like the others in this series, the format is notably agreeable.


This book is an historical account of the development of the occupational training unit at Westerlea with a description of its present make-up. Of the 120 pages, the first 57 are text and the remaining pages are photographs of varying interest.

The text makes interesting and informative reading and one must realize that much of the work was pioneer work involving trial and error, and this account tells how ideas arose and were developed. Some 17 pages are thus devoted to the history of the development of the unit.

Occupational therapy has been divided into 3 main sections: (1) activities of daily living; (2) remedial games; and (3) remedial craftwork. It is gratifying to see that the first of these developed into the most important aspect of the work, i.e., feeding, dressing, toileting, etc.

While not everyone will agree with the particular philosophy or physiological ideas behind some of the work, it can still be said that many beneficial activities were devised even if for a reason or by reasoning not acceptable to all.

An account is given of an out-patient unit operating on the same lines and there is a further account of the development of a sheltered workshop in the form of a laundry, which enable a number of spastics to be self supporting and at the same time provide a useful service to the community. The work has been very much along the lines of developing skills in connexion with daily living, and it is on much firmer ground in this respect than when directed to remedial activities. No attempt has been made to analyse individual cases or groups of cases nor to give figures or results statistically. For those concerned with setting up such a unit this book will provide much useful information, and indeed it is a pity that greater detail of methods and apparatus is not always given, though the main interest of the photographs is when they provide this information.


This is the first volume to appear and is second in a series of five volumes in German on Human Genetics, and deals with the skeleton. The Editor of the series is Professor Becker of Göttingen, well known for his contribution to the clinical and genetic classification of muscular dystrophy.

Paediatricians and orthopaedic surgeons will find the volume a most valuable source of references, especially references from continental literature. Certain of the individual chapters are well written, for example, that by Lenz on anomalies of growth and body build, in which is discussed most of the syndromes associated with dwarfishm; that of Schulze on the anomalies of the teeth and jaws; and that of Degenhardt on the anomalies of the skull and back-bone. Other sections, such as that on generalized diseases of the skeleton and the limb bones, are complete, but do not attempt to integrate what is known of the genetics, probably because the authors are experienced clinicians rather than geneticists.

All those interested in genetics will look forward to the appearance of the other four volumes.

Tuberculosis in Twins. By BARBARA SIMONDS. (Pp. 81; 31 tables + appendixes. 10s. 6d.) London: Pitman. 1964.

From 1950 to 1957 Dr. Barbara Simonds conducted an inquiry on behalf of the Prophit Committee of the Royal College of Physicians into 'the genetic variation of...