
Theories regarding the causation of congenital defects have a remarkable capacity to arouse unscientific passions aimed at their defence or demolition. The roles of maternal emotions, of intrauterine compression, and of amniotic adhesions will be hotly debated for many years to come. While such exchanges of opinion are inexpensive fun, any attempt to assemble facts costs much time and trouble. Dr. Torpin is an obstetrician whose interest in amniotic adhesions was stimulated by personal observations, and who subsequently took the trouble to comb the literature of the subject and to carry out some experiments with amnion.

The resulting book is primarily a comprehensive review of almost 500 articles culled from the medical literature of many countries over more than 150 years. Their essence is presented in short and readable chapters. There are many illustrations, both photographic and line drawings. (Some of them are a trifle gruesome, and the book should not be accidentally left on the nursery table.)

In spite of all this work, there still remains a wide gulf between the recorded observations which Dr. Torpin summarizes, and the hypothesis he proposes to explain them. The theory may attract no converts, but the homework has been done very thoroughly.


The reviewer confesses to having started to peruse this book with some mild prejudice, questioning whether neonatal cardiology really justified a separate book, having regard to the admirable texts on paediatric cardiology already available. But the fact is that much of the most severe congenital heart disease presents in an acute form in the neonatal period. The difficulties the paediatrician is faced with in handling these acutely ill babies are not only very great, they also differ in many ways from those at all later ages. The patency of the foramen ovale and ductus, with the complex shunts to which they can give rise, and the difficulty of distinguishing between a cardiac versus a pulmonary cause in a cyanosed and distressed baby are obvious examples.

For these reasons it seems both logical and practical to devote a book to neonatal cardiology; its perusal quickly overcame the reviewer's prejudice on the matter. A good example of the usefulness of the book is the section on the normal ECG in the premature and full-term infant, delineating well a picture which is changing during the course of the first 24 hours.

This volume is in the same series as Avery's The Lung and its Disorders in the Newborn Infant, also reviewed in these columns. It makes a worthy companion volume, and without doubt, Rowe and Mehrizi will be found alongside Avery in many a centre where newborns are cared for.


The enthusiastic welcome accorded the first edition (1964) of this book when it was reviewed in these columns must certainly be given again to the second edition, despite the steep rise in price from £2 6s. to £4 1s. Many of the omissions and points which could be criticized in the previous edition have been corrected, and the book is admirably up to date. When discussing controversial or poorly understood subjects, such as the aetiology and treatment of respiratory distress syndrome, Dr. Avery likes to adopt an historical approach, and to set down past or present theories, while gently pointing out their defects. It was this approach perhaps that led some reviewers of the first edition to criticize the author for not more ruthlessly excising irrelevant deadwood. However, careful reading invariably shows Dr. Avery leaving one in no doubt as to her own opinions. Indeed, it is most useful to have references to past work, for data interpreted originally as pointing to one conclusion may later be resuscitated to provide support for some quite different theory.