Book Review


The fourth edition of this well-known and popular textbook will attract a wide range of readers, as it has done in the past, after its recent revision which has involved the rewriting of parts of the text, the addition of new material, and the provision of an improved comprehensive index. An outstanding feature of The Normal Child is the continuing stress placed throughout on normal biological variation, and be leavened with a few more illustrations. However, such added embellishments would undoubtedly have led to an increase in production costs whereas the price of this new edition, has, in fact, been kept at a modest figure. The book is clearly written and easy to follow, but in one or two places the reader may find the text a little tedious. For instance, in the section dealing with three months' colic the author, having stated that the aetiology of the disturbance is unknown, then proceeds to give no less than 40 suggested causes culled from the literature.

Though 180 new references have been added to the latest edition one feels that there are still some gaps to be filled. Thus, in the early chapters about breastfeeding we are told, 'It is a fallacy to suppose that human breast milk is sterile. In one study it was found that 93% of newborn babies were drinking staphylococci in their mothers' milk.' And then a little later we read, 'There is some evidence that proteins may pass through into the breast milk and even cause allergic manifestations in the baby.' No references are given for these two provocative statements. Again, in the section on 'Cold Injury' we are informed that this disturbance has been described in association with thyroid deficiency but the source of this information is not given. Yet, four pages later there is a seven-line account of the 'Hula Hoop Syndrome' with two references.

Repetitions are inevitable in a book so comprehensive as this but occasionally these may lead to confusion. Thus, in the chapter on 'The Prevention of Common Infections' we read, 'It is advised that other immunization procedures should be avoided for three weeks following vaccination for smallpox. The triple vaccine may be given simultaneously with smallpox vaccination. Poliomyelitis vaccine should not be given within three weeks of smallpox vaccination.' Some may think that this statement is difficult to reconcile with one a few lines later which reads 'Poliomyelitis and smallpox vaccination can be carried out together,...'

In parts the phrasing of the text is a little obscure and may confuse the student, in particular. In the section on 'The Newborn at Birth' we learn that 'He lies on his side, with his arms and legs flexed.' Does the author mean if he is placed on his side? Again, referring to 'The Sensitive Period', Illingworth writes, 'It has long been known that if a congenital cataract is not removed soon enough the child will never see...'. Presumably, the author is talking of severe bilateral cataracts, but what does he mean by soon enough? Would it not be more correct to say that young babies deprived of visual stimuli in the early months of life may, in spite of corrective treatment, have grave and persisting perceptual problems? Is it true to say that these infants will never see?

These are minor criticisms of a major work of high merit.