Book Reviews


This book reports a study made in 1965, by the St. Mary’s Paediatric Unit, of the social and medical circumstances of 100 West Indian children and their families living in Paddington. The major part of the field work was done by a paediatrician and a social worker. The methods and results are described carefully and accurately, but also commendably clearly and briefly. The essential parts can be read in less than an hour, and they provide a most interesting and valuable picture of the West Indian family life in London.

West Indian families are rather larger than English families living in the same district. They maintain strong links with the West Indies, many having older children living there; three-quarters of the families were sending money home, despite their low income here. The mothers are likely to go out to work and to have their 1-year-old minded during the day. The home is usually a flat or single room in an old, decaying house with inadequate toilet and cooking facilities. However, the room itself will be kept bright and clean. There may be little encouragement, in the way of materials or stimulation, for the child to play, and he will perhaps be talked to less than an English child. He will probably walk earlier. He will make good use of the health services, and be a regular attender at the Infant Welfare Clinic, but he may be somewhat more prone to minor, especially respiratory, illness, than his English counterpart. From the point of view of these children’s future development, the most worrying thing in this study is their apparent lack of stimulation to talk and play. It is good to know that a follow-up study is planned; the children will now be starting at their infant school, and it will be most valuable to hear how they integrate into school life, and how well they learn.

It is easy for middle-class English doctors and social workers, consciously or subconsciously, to apply to all families with whom they deal the same basic assumptions that would be appropriate to a middle-class suburban English family. When these assumptions are not fulfilled, they may feel that the family is irrational, stupid, or irresponsible, rather than that they were looking at it in the wrong way in the first place. Many of us, including the reviewer, have made this mistake. Everyone in the medical or social services who meets West Indian children and their families should read this warm-hearted and highly informative book; it will enable him to help them with greater understanding, enjoyment, and effectiveness.


Having by chance read through this book in parallel with some occasional pieces by Charles Dickens, the reviewer was struck by the similarity of the problem it deals with to that which excited the indignation of the great reforming novelist—the moral and intellectual degradation of the children of the urban poor by a combination of ignorance, squalor, disease, malnutrition, and apathy with class (or racial) prejudice masquerading as eugenics.

But if the moral impetus behind the writing of ‘Disadvantaged Children’ reminds one of Dickens, the approach is that of Darwin—a critical examination of the mass of relevant data so thorough and comprehensive that the reader is convinced of the authors’ thesis long before they themselves seem to feel that their case is complete.

The result is an admirable book which maps out that territory between medicine, sociology, and politics, which the parochial preoccupations of these various disciplines have in Western democratic countries and particularly the USA caused them to neglect. Any society that allows a large proportion of its young to go to waste is on the way to committing suicide; yet we remain more concerned about, and are prepared to pay more for prolonging life in the chronic sick than ensuring that new generations are given the wherewithal for a healthy life.

All children’s doctors, but particularly those who hanker after the American way of practising medicine, should read this book; it will show them both how good system is and how much better it needs to be: the alternative is not the American but the communist way of doing things, with all the loss of personal concern that this involves.


This second edition is entirely new book, and is made up of 21 chapters. Many of the 18 contributors are drawn from Professor Wilkinson’s colleagues at Great Ormond Street, and there are two from the U.S.A. and one from Australia. The chapters vary much in scope, from that on clinical genetics by C. O. Carter occupying a bare 6 pages, to a most detailed account of the functional anatomy of the pelvic muscula-
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ture by J. D. N. Lawson of three times that length. The Sheffield group of K. B. Zachary, J. Lister, and W. J. W. Sharrard provides a useful account of spina bifida, drawing on their exceptional experience to give a consolidated account of treatment methods, although 'recent advances' in this field remain sadly few.

The modest format of the book, plus the brevity with which several of the subjects are treated, makes me wonder if the specialist paediatric surgeon, who glances at it, will judge it too lacking in depth to teach him much. For example, in the chapter by J. Lister on repair of oesophageal atresia, the crucial question of how to handle the case where primary repair is not possible is dealt with too cursorily to be of much practical use, while the author himself provides here no clear idea of what his own current practice is. References are given without titles, which surely must halve their usefulness.


This is the third edition of the standard textbook by Professor Swenson and 24 colleagues at the Children's Memorial Hospital and Northwestern University, Chicago. The opening chapters deal very fully with general considerations such as neonatal physiology, genetics, anaesthetics, intensive care, and psychological effects of hospitalization—a topic which it is good to see discussed so thoughtfully in a surgical textbook. The remaining sections cover surgical problems comprehensively under the usual anatomical headings. Neurosurgery, orthopaedics, and other surgical specialties are included.

The text is, of course, intended primarily for the surgeon, and surgical techniques are described in detail with numerous illustrations. However, this book will also be of great value to the paediatrician, providing clear and authoritative guidance on the surgical problems which he frequently encounters. The style is readable; the photographs, x-rays, drawings, and diagrams are of excellent quality, and the two volumes are particularly handsomely produced.


This is a big book, two-thirds as big as Nelson's Textbook of Pediatrics, and 18 of its 1000 odd pages are required to list the 334 contributors (is this a record?). This question has to be asked—is the idea of divorcing therapy from the rest of medicine a good or even a possible one? This book has failed to convince one reader that it is. Many contributors have clearly given up the attempt to restrict themselves solely to treatment, so that some articles differ little from those to be found in a full textbook. Others seem to have felt that the amount of space devoted to a subject ought to bear some relation to its importance, whereby an article on obesity is given 3 pages, though the message from its author could virtually have been given in the same number of words—"Treatment is hopeless'. Similarly, the section on intussusception (2 pages) boils down to little more than a statement that there exists a choice of two methods of treatment, surgical or enema reduction, though the author might surely have discussed indications for the employment of each.

Here and there one encounters pearls, as, for instance, J. D. Crawford's excellent account of the management of the too-tall girl. But even here the disadvantages of restricting discussion solely to therapy are evident, as the crucial question of diagnosis, i.e. prediction of height in these individuals, is not covered.

It is only fair to add that there are clearly many paediatricians who by no means share this reviewer's lukewarm appreciation of the book, to judge from the wide circulation enjoyed by the three previous volumes.


This book gives an account of the proceedings of the First European Congress of Perinatal Medicine held in Berlin in March 1968. Over 80 articles are included in its 300 pages and they can be classified under three main headings. The first is concerned with antenatal diagnosis and treatment, the emphasis being heavily on the problem of severe rhesus iso-immunization. One must hopefully look to the reports of future congresses for consideration of disturbances in placental function or indeed any of the obstetric aspects of prematurity, which assume increasing importance in view of the great demands on medical and nursing skills created by neonatal special care units. The second section deals with the monitoring of the fetus in the intrapartum period, and to judge from the places of origin of the articles presented here it would seem that Salinger's influence remains stronger on the continent of Europe than in Britain. It is pertinent to mention here the excellence throughout of the English translations, which have been undertaken by Dr. W. B. Schulze. The later sections are concerned with the newborn infant, and cover resuscitation, energy requirements, and the management of respiratory difficulty; and here many notable British contributions are well represented.

It has apparently been the editor's intention that the individual chapters should be largely self-contained. To some extent this aim has been achieved, but liberal quantities of space given to diagrams and tables of results have left little room for the development of the authors' arguments, and in the end the over-all impression is of a book which contains a series of brief and somewhat dogmatic accounts of personal practice. Most of the discussions have been omitted and only occasionally does the flavour of genuine debate and discussion break through, most clearly, needless to say, in the section on resuscitation.