Book Reviews


This book continues the series Clinics in Developmental Medicine and was produced by a study group composed largely of paediatricians and psychologists who have been meeting at intervals of two years to discuss child neurology and cerebral palsy. The subject of the 1968 study group was chosen, to quote the editors, 'to remind members that physicians and psychologists have a part to play in helping every child to develop his full potential, a part supplementary to and co-existent with the work of the educator'.

The articles, 11 by British authors and 5 by American, include research reports as well as selective reviews of the research literature. The largest group of articles is concerned with language development: in dealing with preverbal speech development and linguistic development, Ingram describes work on devising tests to give a quantitative assessment of the progress of the child and enable deviation from normal to be recognized. Huxley in two articles reports on American, Russian, and British work in language development. Cashdan discusses the role of movement in the formation of the association between word and meaning. His own work is with severely retarded children who are brought up at home by their mothers.

Educational problems are raised in several papers, including that by Wolff on programmes designed to enrich the environment (he is sceptical of their value); Rutter surveys dyslexia, and Cashdan comments on Domon's reading method 'Teach your baby to read'. Kuffer also raises a very real educational issue in her paper on modal preference. She emphasizes that those children with spatial/visual bias rather than verbal orientation are more likely to fail in the present educational system.

A third group of papers deals with direct experimental studies. Barnett discusses the role of heredity and environment on the development of behaviour in the rat. Connolly reviews various experiments showing the severe effects that follow from interference with the interaction of the sensory and motor systems, either by sensory deprivation or restraint on movement. One is a little surprised to find no mention of the classic work of Hubel and Wiesel in the visual system showing that there is a critical period where appropriate use of the nervous system is crucial for normal development.

As a means of reminding the physician and psychologist of the role they have to play in the development of children, this book can be said to have achieved the stated aim of the editors. The articles read easily and provide useful introductions to several fields. Anyone expecting much more than this will be disappointed.


The ideal handbook should be small, portable, packed solid with the kind of information the user actually needs to be able to find quickly, and set out in such a way that he can find it quickly. A Paediatric Vade Mecum fulfils these requirements as closely as any handbook of any kind which we have seen. It has been put to the practical test of 22 years' use in the Birmingham Children's Hospital and has recently, and rightly, enjoyed increasing popularity outside under the title of The B.C.H. Vade-Mecum. It has now been produced by a professional publisher as a neat and well-bound paper back. The chapters include Normal Data, Nutrition, Fluid and Electrolytes, The Newborn, Infections, Paediatric Emergencies, Accidental Poisoning, and practical notes on prescribing, including very full information on drug dosages. Sections that are likely to be needed particularly often are distinguished by different coloured pages. One has to admire the skill with which everything appropriate to a handbook has been included, and everything inappropriate has been left out. It is not, as handbooks so often are, weighed down by facile attempts to deal with subjects like emotional development or behaviour disturbance in half a dozen pages. This is unquestionably the best paediatric pocket-book available, and every paediatric house officer should have it and use it.