Book Reviews


In many countries, including the United States, paediatric neurology is a well-recognized and reasonably well-defined speciality. In the United Kingdom it still seems to be looking for its identity. Those who do recognize its existence may approach it primarily from adult neurology or primarily from paediatrics. The two points of view are not irreconcilable; they happily meet for example in the new European Paediatric Neurology Group. But in general the neurologist will be more interested in pathology and localizing neurological signs; the paediatrician more interested in neurological development and its disorders.

The two points of view are well represented by these two books, which are of roughly comparable size. Professor Dekabian places great emphasis on neuroanatomy and pathology; his chapter headings are based wherever possible on the pathological classification of disease. Of course, some subjects which cannot readily be put under pathological headings have to be dealt with—cerebral palsy, mental deficiency, and epilepsy—and development is not neglected. However, the chapter on development contains a great deal of developmental neuroanatomy—excellent described—and deals perfunctorily with what the child can actually do at different ages. Dr. Gamstorp on the other hand is primarily a paediatrician, though one with great experience of childhood neurological disorders. The developmental approach is more evident throughout her book, and her chapter headings deal largely with symptoms or practical problems rather than particular pathologies.

Perhaps reassuringly, the books are not nearly so different on detailed reading as their differences in approach suggest. Either could usefully find a place in the paediatric department library. This reviewer strongly prefers Dr. Gamstorp's approach to the subject, but paradoxically found Professor Dekabian's book marginally more useful. The explanation is that Dr. Gamstorp is best on those subjects which are most familiar to paediatricians, and which they are therefore less likely to look up in the textbook. Professor Dekabian devotes more space to particular pathologies and to the rarer disorders; he describes them well, and gives many useful references, so he provides more help where the practising paediatrician is most likely to need it.

On the other hand, Dr. Gamstorp provides a more balanced introduction to the subject for the paediatrician in training.


This study of mental subnormality among children 8 to 10 years old of an entire community—the City of Aberdeen—has obvious advantages compared with studies on more limited and selected samples. There are other reasons why this work is of quite unusual value and reliability—the relative stability of the population of Aberdeen, the high quality of the records on all the children, including the maternal and neonatal notes, the availability of psychometric tests on all children in the city at age 7, and, not least, the experience and distinction of the authors.

The prevalence rate of mental subnormality as ascertained by the local authority was 12.6 per 1000 children. A further 14.8 children per 1000 had measured IQs below 75 but were in ordinary schools: adding these to the first group gave an overall prevalence of 27.4 per 1000 among children of this age in this community.

The most striking epidemiological findings concern the social class distribution of subnormality: by far the largest proportion came from the lowest social class, with the prevalence rate in the skilled manual working class nine times higher than in the non-manual class. But there was a striking difference in the distribution of types of (administratively defined) mental subnormality within the different social classes. Severe mental subnormality (IQ below 50) had the same prevalence—about 5 per 1000—in all social classes, whereas the prevalence of mild subnormality (IQ 60 or above) steadily increased with each step down the social ladder from no cases in social classes I to IIa to 25 cases per 1000 in social class V.

The fact that mild subnormality is so much commoner in the poorer sections of the community has been found in previous studies, but rarely so strikingly set out as here.

Is this mild subnormality genetically or environmentally determined? The authors build up what must seem, to readers less critical and scientifically exacting than themselves, an overwhelming case for the environmentalist point of view. They show that even within the lower social classes, mild subnormality is highly significantly related to family size, poor housing, and overcrowding. Yet they cautiously and correctly say, 'In the present study there is no way in which we can separate these factors (constitutional factors and social-familial environment) in terms of relative contribution to cause.'

The most difficult part of the study (for the authors
and the reader) is that dealing with the contribution of pregnancy and perinatal complications to mental subnormality, and the highly complex interrelationships of these factors with social class. The least convincing part of the study is the definition of a 'CNS-+' group, presumed to have 'Organic brain defect' on the basis of having what sound rather nondescript neurological signs.

This admirable book leaves one with two strong impressions—first of the powerfulness of the epidemiological method, and secondly of the extent to which mental subnormality is a problem related to social circumstances. It may not be conclusively proved that this relation is a causal one, but the evidence is certainly strong enough to give further justification for an all-out attack on poverty and all its works—not only on the grounds of compassion but also of economy of human resources. However, the chances of this happening seem relatively slender at a time when the precepts of Samuel Smiles find more official favour than those of the Sermon on the Mount. All paediatricians and community health doctors should read this book.


This, the fourth edition, consists of 15 chapters, all but one written by a single author, to review subjects of current importance to paediatricians. Six chapters deal with the newborn and seven chapters are broad-based dealing with subjects such as respiratory function, endocrine function, immunological disorders, and genetics. Each chapter consists of a well-illustrated text with good references, relatively few of which are as recent as 1970. Most illustrations and diagrams used are good but there are exceptions. The reference system is reliable and clear, and the index adequate but not generous. The first four chapters dealing with fetal and neonatal respiration, fetal growth, asphyxia neonatorum, and respiratory distress syndrome are paediatric. Overemphasis on animal experiments has unfortunately dominated neonatal topics for many years and is much in evidence in the first chapter. The otherwise good chapter on fetal growth does not include a discussion on the value or use of ultrasonic techniques which is now routine and no longer a research method in up-to-date hospitals in Britain. Curiously, a reference to ultrasonic measurement of growth is in the chapter on haemolytic disease of the newborn. The chapter on asphyxia neonatorum contains uninspired orthodox dogma including the tired and very unconvincing story of drowned rabbits being better than controlled trials of asphyxiated neonates when assessing the value of hyperbaric oxygen. One suspects the author has never seen an asphyxia neonatorum treated by this useful modern technique and understates the hazards of intubation and positive pressure ventilation in other than the most expert hands.

The chapter on care of the infant in an incubator is a very wise inclusion with practical and useful advice. The chapter on haemolytic disease of the newborn is very comprehensive and well worth reading. The chapters dealing with genetics, immunology, and assessment of endocrine function, and on respiratory function, are highly competent and will give valuable information to all but the most highly informed.

The chapter dealing with diabetes mellitus is in two sections: the first, general problems, and the second, ocular complications. One would like to have seen more extensive discussion of the significance and possible manipulation of cholesterol metabolism in these children with a view to improving the long-term prognosis. If vascular disaster is to be avoided in these children it must be positively prevented.

The chapter on the nephrotic syndrome is competently written but with a strong histological bias which makes it mostly of interest to those with a primary interest in histology rather than in the clinical aspects of the disease. Sections of this book will be of interest to all consultant paediatricians who can confidently be advised to purchase it. It is too advanced for undergraduate students or for those studying for the D.C.H. or for general practitioners. The postgraduate studying for a M.R.C.P. in pediatrics must study this book carefully. The editors and publishers are to be congratulated on the general appearance and lay-out of the book but one would hope that the fifth edition will have less emphasis on neonatology.


The publication of 'Pädiatrische Neurochirurgie' in 1967 provided an encyclopaedic survey of the steadily enlarging field of neurosurgery in infancy and childhood. Dr. Koos has greatly expanded the section on intracranial tumours from 137 pages to over 400, with the help of Dr. Meredith Miller of Washington DC. The new publication has the great advantage for some of us of being written in English instead of in German. Though the authors state in their preface that they 'have no intention of writing a textbook', they have dealt in detail with all important aspects of their large subject—statistics, pathology, clinical presentation, investigation, and treatment. Everything is here that a neurosurgeon could reasonably want in a textbook and far more than a paediatrician is likely to require.

There are numerous excellent x-rays accompanied by helpful line drawings to emphasize the key points. The quality of reproduction of these and indeed of all the illustrations is outstanding. The statistics are presented by ingeniously designed tables and are a rich source of information. The more recently developed investigatory techniques such as radioactive isotope brain scanning and ultrasonography of skull and orbit are described in detail but without sufficient critical assessment of their value compared with the more established methods of diagnosis in childhood.