Book Reviews


This book contains the edited proceedings of an International Conference on Coeliac Disease, held in the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, London, in November 1969. The 47 participants fairly represent the major groups of workers in this subject from Britain, Europe, the U.S.A., and Australia.

The contents are grouped round several broad themes. Papers on the chemistry of wheat proteins, together with histochemical and enzymatic studies of the intestinal mucosa, summarize the evidence for a ‘toxic’ aetiology of coeliac disease; these are followed by fascinating and sometimes contradictory immunological studies of immunoglobulin and cell-mediated reactions in this disease. Of no less importance are chapters on mucosal morphology before and after gluten installation, genetic studies, and the possible relation of coeliac disease to diseases of the skin. A third section deals with the complications of malignancy and intestinal ulceration.

The book closes, as did the conference, with a general discussion centred on ‘What is Coeliac disease?’ In this the central dilemmas are highlighted, for it is evident that basic definitions are not uniform between groups working in different countries and with different age groups of patients, and that this probably hindered progress before the conference.

This book is well edited, and the illustrations are of high quality. It is recommended reading for all who have responsibility for coeliac patients, and should open the possibility of new research lines.

The Pathology of Deafness. An Introduction.

By MARY INGLE WRIGHT. (Pp. vi + 178; tables. £2.64.) Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1971.

As the author states in her foreword, physicians have often regarded the ear as irrelevant to their study of the whole patient, and this has led to some obscurity in the literature of the pathology of deafness. Some of this obscurity has now been lifted, for, in this small book, Dr. Wright has compressed into 170 pages a most comprehensive list of references on all aspects of this subject. Information has been collected from every conceivable source, and it is impossible to think of anything that has been left out. There are chapters on embryological factors, ototoxic agents, nutritional problems, and infections—five chapters on this latter subject alone.

The book has been written from the pathologist’s standpoint rather than from that of the clinician, and this, combined with the vast amount of information contained in it, has the inevitable result that more space has been devoted to rare and very rare conditions than to the common diseases which make up most of one’s practice. This may, however, be no bad thing if it draws attention to the fact that so little has been published, comparatively speaking, about these more common conditions, and if it stimulates further research into them.


This symposium by a group of experts in the field sets out to define asthma. The fact that they failed to do so does not reduce its value. It is a compact summary 174 pages long which ranges over clinical diagnosis, pathology, physiological abnormalities, immunological mechanisms, and the pharmacology of asthma. Each section is followed by a valuable discussion. It is essentially a book for the specialist and much of what is discussed applies to the adult rather than the child.

The amount of practical information which is of use to the paediatrician is necessarily quite limited. However, the clinician with a special interest in this field would find it both readable and stimulating.


This book by 28 contributors is from Tennessee and is dedicated to the medical students of that University. It is intended as an introductory textbook for the student and a handbook for the resident, ‘combining brevity and clarity with a proper degree of comprehensiveness’. Despite the title, brevity has often been sacrificed to allow a fuller presentation of basic physiological or clinical principles, and small size has been achieved at the expense of some cramping. Though rare syndromes are numerous in the index, the reviewer could not find descriptions of two such common conditions as Bell’s palsy, and erythema nodosum. Cerebral palsy is sketchily described and the whole topic of spina bifida and its associated problems receives a few lines only.

Some of the sections are excellent and there is a sensible subdivision of material, including, for example, chapters on genetic counselling, immunization procedures, and accidents. The therapeutics are sound and up to date.