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.


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.

156
Overall the book has a certain appeal of its own, and there is an astonishing amount of information in a small space. In the words of one paediatric house officer, 'it is easily nursed'.


'Learning disabilities now constitute the most pervasive medical problem of children in the United States . . . (affecting) between 5 and 20% of the non-retarded child population.' This opening statement from the Editor's Introduction gives the background to this book, and to the increasing involvement of paediatricians in problems of this kind. 16 authors contribute to the 9 chapters, 4 of which were part of a symposium and 5 written subsequently. Not surprisingly the book is something of a patchwork of varied quality.

Perhaps the most successful chapter is that by Dr. S. D. Clements and colleagues from Little Rock on 'Two cases of Learning Disabilities'. These children are presented in such a way as to illuminate the whole problem of learning disorders, and how they can be assessed and managed.

What will surprise most British paediatricians is the emphasis given to the use of drugs in learning disorders. 6 of the 9 chapters are on medication, including an 86-page transcript of a discussion (which would have benefited from further editorial shortening and summarizing). The final chapter by Dr. L. J. Whitson on Clinical Pharmacology of Psychotropic Drugs is, by contrast, a masterly and valuable short summary with an excellent annotated bibliography.

The British paediatrician concerned with learning problems in children—and there are few who should not be—will find a good deal of interest in this book. He will probably not recommend it to beginners in this field, because the emphasis on medication differs so much from normal British paediatric practice. But he must be left asking the tantalizing question of whether we use the central stimulants, the tranquillizers, and the antidepressants, too little in the treatment of these children, or whether our American colleagues use them too much.


In the preface to this book Professor R. A. McCance writes that, 'Some paediatricians will not find this book easy to read'—I would say that most of us will find it difficult but fascinating and some will feel that 'they are not prepared to move with the times'. Having said this I must emphasize that this is an excellent publication of high standard which will be of considerable benefit to units concerned with human development, both fetal and postnatal, with the care of premature, immature, and sick infants and with metabolic research into disorders in early infancy.

The scope of the book is wide, and it is unlikely that many clinicians will be conversant with all the concepts and biochemical advances detailed in the text. With the aid of the numerous references after each chapter it will be a good book to turn to when considering certain developmental situations in the fetus and the newborn baby.

There are ten chapters covering aspects of development ranging from the regulation of liver function during development (Serini and Principi) to Autocoids in Ontogenesis (Mitchell and Porter). The discussion on 'Intrauterine diagnosis and antenatal detection of inherited disease' (Nyhan) underlines the possibilities and the present limitations in the use of these techniques and demonstrates that the availability of human fetal material in culture in the form of cells derived following amniocenesis provides a real opportunity for the study of human development.

The editor (Philip Benson) has contributed a thoughtful section on the Regulation of Genetic Expression including details of some of his own work; and Neil Raiha writes about ornithine and arginine metabolism, describing the development of the mechanisms for the conversion of ornithine to glutamate, polyamines, and creatine, as well as the development of the urea cell enzymes. Ralph Brinster gives a clear description of the biochemistry of the preimplantation period in the mouse and suggests that this information can reasonably be extrapolated to human embryos.

The remaining chapters are concerned with the development of enzymes for carbohydrate metabolism (D. G. Walker) which is clear and concise, changes in human haemoglobin (Huehns and Beaven), and genetic polymorphism (Adinolfi). Finally there is a long and detailed chapter on lipid metabolism (N. B. Myant) which includes sections on lipids in postnatal brain development and certain developmental disorders of lipid metabolism.


In November 1967, some 150 scientists drawn from the biological and social sciences met for four days in Philadelphia to discuss some of the wider aspects of their own subjects. This is the (somewhat belated) record of that symposium, and the editor (Victor C. Vaughan, a paediatrician) states in his preface that: 'The goal of the conference was not so much to reveal answers to problems as to make sure the right questions were being asked, the ultimate answers to which might serve as guides to social and political action. Attention was given in turn to the earliest environmental influences.