Differential Diagnosis in Pediatric Neurology.

To write a textbook on paediatric neurology is a harder task now than 10 years ago, and is likely to become more difficult with the increasing complexity of the subject. Of the many attempts made in recent years some have been more successful than others: all have encountered the problem of keeping up to date in the light of biochemical advances and the reclassification of diseases that these have necessitated.

It was therefore an excellent idea to produce a book which, instead of following the traditional pattern of describing diseases by systems or aetiology, has chapters discussing the common neurological presenting complaints or clinical situations. As the author disarmingly points out in a foreword, the similar initial manifestations of many different neurological diseases means that this approach presents a formidable problem of repetition and overlapping. Dr. Lagos, however, has handled his material with great skill, and in addition has a readable style, so that though occasional longueurs are inevitable with recurring lists of common symptoms, the book is easy to read and yields up its information readily, being particularly useful for the student, resident, paediatrician, and family doctor who must consider the differential diagnosis in a particular situation and supplement his reading from more standard texts and journals.

The conditions described are dealt with in reasonable depth and the author has included a considerable amount on pathology, investigation, and treatment, though he has sensibly freed himself from the burden of having to write statutory sections on these aspects for every disease considered.

Five useful appendices and a glossary of eponyms end the book. The clinical and fundus photographs, x-rays, and pathological illustrations are excellent. The standard of x-ray plates is far higher than in most journals and books: it is, for example, unusual to be able to see suprasellar calcification or a difference in the size of the two optic foramina so clearly in such small plates.

Each of the 19 chapters has a useful list of references with some as recent as the 1970s. This might have been more valuable if they had been indicated in the text, and the British reader may regret that there are not more references from this side of the Atlantic.


Among the many accolades deservedly awarded to 'Kanner' since its first appearance 37 years ago, none has been more apposite than that of the British Medical Journal, 'Still the only textbook on child psychiatry of international status'—a tribute as currently germane to the 4th edition as to earlier issues.

Nevertheless, 15 years have elapsed since the 3rd edition, and in that time, as the author himself concedes, 'there has been a veritable publication explosion . . . the sifting (of which) . . . represents a truly Herculean task'. However, certain areas do merit special mention because they reflect growing points in this branch of medicine, and among these, for example, an effort has been made to include the controversial topic of minimal brain damage, and the important subject of cytogenetics, with particular reference to Down's syndrome.

On the other hand, recent contributions to the field of infantile autism, by Lorna Wing and Michael Rutter, for example, or by Israel Kolvin and Christopher Ounsted, have somehow failed to attract detailed discussion, despite the author's role as progenitor of Kanner's syndrome. Similarly, scant reference will be found to recent developments in the field of affective disorders of childhood and the scope of thymoletic drugs in their treatment.

Perhaps this is because 'progress has been so fast . . . and the literature so abundant, that much time will be needed to test some of the new hypotheses . . . before they can be included in a textbook'.

Yet, despite the conservative scale of textual revision adopted by the author, so much of what this book retains has a timeless quality about it, as to commend it anew to a fresh generation of paediatricians and child psychiatrists who will find within it the distilled wisdom of a humane and uniquely experienced clinician. For them, as for the reviewer, the master has not lost his magic.