Book reviews


Most medical teachers know that given time, etc., they could write the ideal textbook for undergraduates. Only a few have the gift and determination to do so, and medical students are fortunate that Meadow and Smithells have chosen to produce the paediatric volume in the Blackwell Lecture Notes Series. At half the price of a comprehensive hardback textbook it is nevertheless rather expensive for students, senior nurses, and perhaps other therapists in training for whom it is intended.

The introductory chapters on the child as a patient, the newborn, infant feeding, and development set the paediatric scene, and deal briefly and well with those aspects of neonatal and infant physiology and pathology usually omitted from preclinical teaching. In the subsequent systematic review the chapters rightly emphasize the paediatric aspects of disease and assume basic knowledge of adult physiology and internal medicine. The book ends with a thoughtful chapter on children in society and some well organized statistics. The appendices contain enough information on growth and development for the student to make his own assessment when clerking a case.

The danger of over-condensation resulting in dull lists has been avoided and the style is anecdotal, fresh, and reflects the unpompous enthusiasm of the authors. There are the inevitable dogmatic statements which make useful discussion points between students who believe them and teachers who do not. More seriously, the discursive style leads to the occasional unhelpful blanket statement, e.g. 'Experimentally a number of biochemical, cytological, and cytological tests on amniotic fluid are being developed . . .' (to assess gestational age), but none is exemplified and one is left asking which? and how? Similarly, the student is told that fetal and maternal blood can be distinguished chemically in neonatal melaena, without giving details; surely this is a simple side-room test a student would be keen to do.

The photographs are good and the drawings usually helpful, though the use of a page to show how to hold a child for examination of its ears, when this will be demonstrated daily during the clinical course, is a waste of space.

A list of books both for factual reference and for further paediatric education: historical, social, and anthropological, would round off this excellent introduction to the medicine of childhood.


About two-thirds of the nearly 500 pages of text are devoted to clinical descriptions of the effects of the different numerical and structural chromosome anomalies described in man. There are many well-reproduced clinical illustrations, mostly of material presented in the original publications, and a large number of corresponding karyotypes of somatic chromosomes. Clear and illustrative diagrams mostly show the origin of various chromosome anomalies, the normal behaviour of chromosomes at mitosis and meiosis (an erroneous drawing of crossing over at chiasmata in Fig. 18, but not in Fig. 16), the segregational behaviour of translocations, etc. The text starts with 80 pages of general introduction to cytogenetics including chromosome nomenclature, autoradiography, nuclear sexing, and X-chromosome inactivation. Then, 100 or so pages are devoted to the clinical description of the various sex-chromosome anomalies (but the fact that many mosaic true hermaphrodites are XO/XY is not stressed) and 200 pages to autosomal anomalies. Sometimes findings are summarized in table form and some disorders like chronic myeloid leukaemia and leukaemia in mongolism are included. Some miscellaneous disorders are then described and a few pages follow on genetic counselling, including some brief comments on amniocentesis and on dermatoglyphs. There are over 1600 full references.

The information is generally clear and accurate and the book fulfils its object of presenting the clinical aspects of human cytogenetics, of covering general cytogenetic principles, and of providing access to the relevant literature. The book was completed before the extensive application of the new chromosome identification techniques at the end of the first growth phase of human cytogenetics. It is a good compendium of established facts and, to the reviewer, more a book that one would wish to consult now and again than to read and study systematically.