Book reviews


From Galen onwards the ductus arteriosus has attracted the attention of anatomists, physicians, and more recently surgeons. The fascinating problems associated with its closure or failure to close, with clinical diagnosis and treatment, and its association with other cardiovascular anomalies have been the subject of a vast literature. Cassels has spent the last 20 years gathering together the fruits of this work.

This is a book for the specialist, a scholarly work which summarizes a vast range of interdisciplinary investigation. It describes in detail the history of research, the embryology, and physiology of ductus arteriosus. The haemodynamics and pathological changes associated with continued patency, with coarctation, pulmonary hypertension, transposition, and with hyaline membrane disease are explained, together with diagnostic criteria and the results of treatment. It is well illustrated and there is an extensive bibliography attached to each chapter. The collection of references is exceptionally complete and a valuable contribution.

As a book to read it suffers from the inclusion of so many minor contributions, which are historically of less interest since they did not influence the main stream of discovery. One sympathizes with the temptation to relate fascinating anecdotes and some of the wilder speculations. On the other hand, the content benefits from the author’s wide experience as a paediatric cardiologist, his long memory of the vagaries of clinical signs, pathological change, and the natural history of disease.


This book is directed at paediatricians and radiologists alike, and to a large extent succeeds in its aim of producing a guide to the interpretation of the newborn chest x-ray.

The book starts with 3 chapters on technical points and on the systematic interpretation of the newborn chest x-ray. It is then divided into 3 main sections comprising medically treatable and untreatable conditions, surgically treatable conditions, and congenital heart disease, with a chapter devoted to each disease in these groups which affects the chest x-ray. The text is well illustrated with 240 good quality x-rays and these are fully reported. For many conditions there are one or two case reports and the x-rays used to illustrate the text are from these patients, giving a coherent picture of the development and progression of the disease. There is a description of each disorder with references and the accounts are full and up to date and provide adequate information for understanding the disease process underlying the chest x-ray. However, one wonders whether a radiologist needs to know the 27 causes of neonatal hydropsycaemia listed.

The style of writing is racy, sloppy, and not always grammatically correct. The North American reader may understand at once what is meant by adjectives such as ‘Aunt Minnie approach’ and ‘findings which are zip’, but I suspect that British readers would find them as incomprehensible as the reviewer. However, in spite of reservations about the use of Queen’s English, this is a useful addition to the library of anyone involved in the care of the newborn, whether he be a radiologist or a paediatrician.


This book was conceived as an attempt to introduce house officers, medical students, and nurses to the different requirements of the care of newborn babies. The format is quite different from that of a standard textbook in that each chapter is devoted to a practical problem, e.g. Neonatal Infections, Assisted Ventilation, etc. The chapters start with a discussion of the physiological background to the subject, followed by a list of practical considerations. There is then a summary of the features of the chief diseases which cause the problem under discussion and this is followed by a detailed guide to management. At the end of each section there is a series of questions which are answered immediately below with reasons for the answer given. Finally, this question and answer method is applied to three or four brief case histories where appropriate. Interspersed throughout the text are comments by Drs. Gerard Odell, Samuel Prod’hom, and Leo Stern. These are occasionally at variance with the opinion ventured in the text but help to give an overall picture of the management as performed in various centres, and also help to lay emphasis where considered necessary. The text also contains many useful graphs and illustrations. The appendix is 48 pages long and contains lists of normal values for newborns, growth charts, and guides to assessment of various problems.

This is a good book and would be useful to have in any newborn nursery. It is reasonably up to date, though there are one or two sections that are more behind the times than seems necessary. It is nice to see a paediatric book which has a chapter on the psychological care of the mother of the sick or dead newborn baby.