

operations requires access to the full range of autosuture instruments. It is perhaps unfortunate that most paediatric surgeons find that the opportunities to exploit their use occur too infrequently to allow the equipment to be mastered.

Every article contains information and advice which is sound, helpful, and seldom controversial. On the last score an exception is the superbly balanced analysis of controversy in the management of myelomeningocele. This, however, advocates that when ventriculitis supervenes in the 'untreated' child, adequate analgesia with diamorphine should be ensured, without emphasizing that in certain circumstances it might prove excessively difficult to convey sincere conviction in justifying this action.

Errors are few, but some have been overlooked; for example, bleeding time is not estimated on a sample of venous blood. The illustrations are clear and contribute to the text, the references to recent literature are invaluable, and the index is carefully compiled. No paediatric surgeon can afford to be without this book, which contains excellent value for the inevitably higher price.

**Serotonin in Down's Syndrome.** Edited by MARY COLEMAN. (Pp. x + 224; illustrated + tables. U.S. \$15.50). Amsterdam: Elsevier. 1973.

In a nutshell, 5-hydroxytryptophan (5HTP) does not help infants with Down's syndrome but may cause undesirable side effects such as temporary slowing down of psychomotor development, hyperactivity, and EEG abnormalities, sometimes associated with convulsive phenomena.

This study was necessary for the examination of the earlier premise that 5HTP might be of therapeutic value in Down's syndrome. In view of these disappointing results, however, the reader can be forgiven for losing some interest in much of the remainder of the book. Moreover, in places the text requires careful reading to avoid misinterpretation: for example the promising results of 5HTP administration in the uncontrolled early study include 'earlier development of

equilibrium and balance, improvement in the mean age of walking, increased activity levels, parental reports of improvement in strabismus and tongue protrusion with variation of 5HTP doses, and lack of cardiac disease in a (selected) initial group of patients'. These findings were not confirmed by the later double-blind trial. Caution also needs to be exercised in the interpretation of the horizontal and longitudinal studies on blood serotonin levels—which are in fact not of serotonin but of total 5-hydroxyindoles. The latter values are usually close to those of serotonin in untreated subjects, but may be appreciably higher in those receiving 5HTP. Why is there a whole chapter on 'other methods of raising serotonin', when this appears to do more harm than good? The book contains interesting data, but these are sometimes difficult to extract and evaluate.

**The Bronchial Provocation Test.** By KJELL AAS. (Pp. ix + 109; 24 figures + 10 tables. U.S. \$14.75.) Springfield, Illinois: Thomas. 1975.

This concise book is a detailed account of the methods and scope of bronchial allergy testing written by one of the foremost authorities on the subject. Techniques of performing bronchial challenge tests are described in some detail, together with various methods of assessing results. Standardization of allergen extracts, the accuracy and the reproducibility of the test are also discussed. The final chapter gives the author's views on when bronchial provocation should be used and makes the important point that in many clinically obvious situations—both positive and negative—this time-consuming procedure is often not needed. For anyone interested in the practical aspects of bronchial allergy evaluation this book is a most useful store of information. It is written very much as a handbook, with extensive references to the literature, but the reader will need to seek out relevant portions which are not always presented in the easiest manner. Many investigators of course are not convinced of the need to perform bronchial provocation in asthmatic children, but for those who wish to do so, reference to this book will ensure that they carry out their tests in the best possible manner.