Book reviews

Fragile Families, Troubled Children. The Aftermath of Infant Trauma. By Elizabeth Elmer. (Pp. 160; tables. £7.95 hardback.) University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh. 1978.

I was becoming rather fed-up with the flood of books detailing theories, researches, or symposia on battered and abused children. This one makes a change, and is stimulating, if only because its conclusions are so much at variance with the others.

Doubts have recently been expressed on whether the underlying attitudes of battering parents can be changed. Perhaps the ultimate test of the effectiveness of medical intervention would be the study of how individuals, who have themselves been battered early in life, in their turn behave and feel towards their own children. Standards for comparison are necessary, and this too entails continuing observation. How could one avoid the problems of observer-altered experiments? How could one refrain from intervening in a control series? Indeed, is it really possible to obtain a truly matched control series?

An American social worker and her co-workers have now reported what is claimed to be the first controlled, long-term follow-up study of child abuse; and they plan to follow the children into adult life. Traumatized infants were divided in 2 groups, according to their assessment as deliberately or accidentally injured. Eight years later some of these judged to have been abused were matched against others classed as accidentally injured. At this later stage, too, an additional group of uninjured children was brought in as a further control.

It is generally accepted that child abuse can harm not only physical but intellectual, emotional, and social development. The author here concludes that the abuse of children made no appreciable difference to the comprehensive development of her cases. The decisive factor, it is claimed, is low social class, associated with poverty. It is, of course, nothing new to affirm that poverty reinforces and perpetuates itself from one generation to another, and long ago Bernard Shaw put it neatly: 'Poverty is the most chronic disease of the poor'. But the absence from this study of

evidence incriminating battering and ill-treatment in developmental impairment is so surprising—as the author candidly admits—that one looks suspiciously at the controls.

The crux, surely, is this. Poverty can certainly impair the development of children; but it seems to me that poverty *plus* abuse would impair it even more, and the differences should be assessable. In the present study the investigators went to considerable lengths to safeguard and validate their basic data, but sophisticated statisticians are likely to detect flaws (they usually do!). I mention only one of the items that disquiet me. Five families, originally classified under the category of accidental injury, were later transferred to the other category, abuse. I would go further. The entire accident group, to my eye, looks suspect. Some among them may well have been injured deliberately; but, in any event, the disturbed emotional climate in families whose children suffer accidents (as distinct from abuse) can itself influence their development adversely.

Although I am reluctant to accept the author's conclusions, I find the book well written and deserving of serious attention. I know from my own experience that, for those involved with battered babies, the passion may be more persuasive than the statistics.

J. APLEY

Towards the Prevention of Fetal Malformation. Edited by J. B. Scrimgeour. (Pp. 301; illustrated + tables. £12.) Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh. 1978.

When your reviewer first gave a lecture on the prevention of fetal malformations, a search of the world literature revealed just one scientific paper in German and one unscientific paper in *Reader's Digest*. Since then the subject has burgeoned, and it is a pleasure to commend this latest book, based on a symposium held in March 1977. The 22 papers are by workers of international repute, and each paper is concise and readable. They cover not only the aetiology and prenatal diagnosis of fetal malformation, but also the management of pregnancy termination, cost

effectiveness (without which no modern symposium feels complete), and the legal and administrative consequences of ante-natal screening.

The production is excellent, and 300 pages of distilled wisdom between hard covers for £12 is tremendous value. Only one black mark can be awarded, for the worst-designed dust jacket of the year, but that is easily removed. This book is mandatory for the perinatal section of every medical library, and strongly advised for the personal bookshelves of paediatricians and obstetricians.

R. W. SMITHELLS

Treatment of Haemophilia A and B and von Willebrand's Disease. Edited by Rosemary Biggs. (Pp. 242; illustrated + tables. £12.00 hardback.) Blackwell: Oxford. 1978.

Treatment of Haemophilia and Other Coagulation Disorders was published in 1966 and described in detail the experience of the Oxford Haemophilia Centre. This book is its natural successor and has been written as an authoritative guide for haematologists, physicians, and surgeons who care for the haemophilic patient, and even, perhaps, the editor intimates, for the patient himself—although no book in that context could surely rival Peter Jones's monograph. Topics covered are: the theory of haemostasis, the factor VIII molecule, clinical and laboratory diagnosis, availability and use of therapeutic materials, home treatment, and many social and economic topics related to the haemophiliac and society. The tone of the book is extremely didactic but this is permissible in view of the authors' unrivalled experience and each chapter is lavishly interspersed with tables and graphs drawn from that experience.

A comparison of the book with its predecessor shows the welcome changes that have taken place in management of haemophilia during the last 12 years—the most important of which, from the patients' point of view, must surely be the advent of home treatment. The comments of patients and parents provide the most compelling illustration of its benefit.