Book reviews

Clinical Genetics. A source book for physicians. Edited by L G Jackson and R G Schimke. (Pp. 652; illustrated + tables. £21.50 hardback.) Wiley: Chichester. 1979.

The two editors are clinical directors of divisions of medical genetics. They have produced a book aimed at encompassing most aspects of clinical genetics, to be the main source of reference for doctors faced with genetic problems. 23 clinical geneticists have contributed chapters on their own specialities, divided into multi-system diseases (including immune disorders, connective tissue disorders, metabolic disorders), and organ system diseases (cardiology, neurology, gastroenterology, and so on). Extensive use has been made of tables, listing specific defects with their modes of inheritance. The book appears to have been produced quickly, so it is reasonably up to date although there are some inaccuracies of reference and index.

The book has one major limitation for those who practise clinical medicine, which is that subjects are not always dealt with in a manner useful or accurate enough for genetic counselling. Guidelines for counselling in X-linked disorders are particularly meagre; carrier detection is described in one sentence each for Duchenne muscular dystrophy and ocular albinism, and is not mentioned at all for X-linked retinitis pigmentosa. Huntington's chorea is described briefly as an autosomal dominant condition with variable age of onset, without giving specific risk figures for relatives at different ages, and the same applies to other late onset dominant disorders. The relative proportion of autosomal dominant retinitis pigmentosa is underestimated, which would give incorrect risks for the offspring of an isolated patient whose parents could not be examined. Some chapters are particularly useful, notably those on cytogenetic disorders, cardiovascular disorders, and hereditary hearing loss.

The editors can be commended for producing a comprehensive account of so many genetic disorders. However, I am not certain that there is a need for such a

book; probably most doctors will find it more useful to consult one of the available excellent monographs on the genetics of specific groups of diseases.

SARAH E BUNDEY

Liver and Biliary Tract Disease in Children. By Daniel Alagille and Michel Odièvre. Translated by Micheline Ste-Marie. (Pp. 364; illustrated + tables. £23.00 hardback.) Wiley: Chichester. 1979.

1979 has been not only the year of the child, but the year of the child's liver! This is now the third monograph this year to have been devoted to hepatobiliary disorders in infants and children. In 19 chapters (pp. 348), the book covers a wide spectrum of childhood hepatology, beginning with methods of investigation, cholestasis in infancy and childhood, hepatic involvement in systemic disease, inborn errors affecting the liver, toxic liver damage, congenital fibrosis, and ending with cirrhosis and tumours; the chapter on acute liver failure in infancy is particularly useful. Even dietary management has not been overlooked.

This is essentially a personal view of liver disorders in infancy and childhood, based on the extensive clinical practice of Professor Alagille and colleagues over 15 years. No attempt has been made therefore, to deal comprehensively with the hepatobiliary system in the young; hence such topics as development, anatomy, and physiology are not included. Even within the area of pathophysiology and disease there is a tendency for rare conditions to receive undue attention, possibly at the expense of the more ordinary. Although about 700 patients a year have chronic liver disorders of whom 308 have cirrhosis of various types, the chapter which deals with this topic is sparse (8 pages), while that on hepatic tumours runs to 20 pages excluding illustrations.

The great clinical experience of the authors gives the work added authority for those topics which are included. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the chapters on cholestasis and portal

hypertension (167 cases). The independent manner in which the authors view several time-honoured dicta is also refreshing—how logical to reserve the term 'neonatal hepatitis' for example, for liver infections in the newborn.

The book is written in a most readable style, as much a tribute to the translator as to the authors. Clinicians seeking diagnostic aid or advice in management will find essential details clearly presented; much of this tends to appear in list form, occasional italics being reserved for the real pearls. Radiological and histological illustrations are clear and each chapter is followed by a full bibliography, which runs to 877 references in all. This is a nice book, beautifully produced, but it faces keen competition from its competitors both of which are cheaper.

JOHN F T GLASGOW

Practical Pediatric Dermatology. By William L Weston. (Pp. 361; illustrated + tables. \$19.95 hardback.) Little, Brown: Boston. 1979.

This book is intended as a practical manual for those concerned with the primary health care of children—the family doctor, the school medical officer, and the paediatrician. The emphasis is firmly placed on general principles and common diseases. The first two chapters briefly, but effectively, consider the structure and function of the skin, and dermatopharmacology; they provide a sound introduction, valuable for the non-dermatologist. The remaining 15 chapters review all the common problems of clinical dermatology, particularly the practical aspects of diagnosis and management. Most of the numerous half-tone illustrations are informative but in a few the definition of the original photograph was evidently not good enough to survive the inevitable loss of detail when art paper is not used. The references at the end of each chapter are recent and well chosen.

In general, Weston has succeeded admirably in providing a clear, accurate, very readable text, which should be welcomed by those for whom it was designed. However the account of fungus