Book reviews

A History of the Study of Human Growth. By J M Tanner. (Pp. 499; illustrated + tables. £30.00 hardback.) Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. 1981.

This was written for historians and human biologists. The first half is a description of the contributions of various human biologists from Solon the Athenian working 600 years before Christ, to Boas the American anthropologist in the twentieth century. The second half takes the background of human biology into the workshop of clinical practice.

Writing of his selection to organise the Harpenden Growth Study for the Ministry of Health in 1948, Professor Tanner suggests that he was the 'obvious, indeed only, candidate': he must be in an almost unique position to write the history of the study of human growth. In this book, in which he reviews more the history of human biology than the history of growth, it is interesting to realise that only recently have studies of human growth begun to impinge on the practice of medicine, which is why this is not a book for the paediatrician to use in his everyday life, but rather a panoramic view of his human biological background. If you like a historical perspective on your work you will enjoy it.

The writing is lucid and entertaining and the facility of expression means that the book would not be out of place on your bedside or coffee table. Unfortunately, the printer and publisher have served Professor Tanner badly as the illustrations are of poor quality, which is disappointing in a book as expensive as this. Even the line graphs are difficult to read. Thus one of the most interesting chapters entitled 'Human proportion and the canons of beauty: the artistic and philosophic tradition' could have been more attractive than it is; this is not a criticism of the scholarship of this endeavour, which is actually at its best in the Renaissance and eighteenth century.

The use of growth assessment, and of the charts associated with it, is now so much a part of the fabric of paediatrics that few of us could imagine our work without it. This book illustrates the long journey that has been made from the description of isolated biological events (such as

menarche) to the putting of art to work. I found it extremely interesting to be brought up to date on the background of the recent growth studies which are little more than names to most of us.

C G D BROOK

Immunological Aspects of Infection in the Fetus and Newborn. Edited by H P Lambert and C B S Wood. The Beecham Colloquia, No 2. (Pp. 249; illustrated + tables. £16.40 (\$39.50) hardback.) Academic Press: London. 1981.

This is a series of brief papers all with fairly lengthy and wide ranging discussions. There are three longer chapters all well worth reading; firstly on the ontogeny of complement, lysozyme, and lactoferrin (Adinolfi), secondly on mucosal surface immunity in the neonatal gut (Allen Walker), and thirdly on the influence of milk in resisting intestinal infection (Reiter). The other papers are short but each acts as a focus for the interesting and informative debates that follow. The sections on clinical aspects of perinatal infection (by Marshall and by Wood), development of immunity (by Hayward), and gut mucosal resistance to infection each have particularly illuminating discussions.

The book is useful, well produced, and valuable as a source of references for those with a special interest in this field, but I am sure that the participants gained more from the meeting in September 1979 than the clinician with a passing interest will glean two years after the event.

C STERN

The Neurological Assessment of the Pre-term and Full Term Newborn Infant. Clinics in Developmental Medicine, No 79. By L Dubowitz and V Dubowitz. (Pp. 106; illustrated + tables. £6.50 hardback.) Spastics International Medical Publications: London. 1981.

For the last 30 years the value of the neonatal neurological examination has been hotly debated; sceptics have rightly questioned the importance of compiling long lists of reflexes, while enthusiasts have tended to overstate the prognostic

value of their methods. However, this discussion has served as the impetus for an enormous amount of clinical research culminating in several examination schemas with differing but overlapping emphases. As may be expected of research tools, these schemas require considerable expertise and much time spent with each infant. To some extent the progress of neonatal neurology has been hindered by the difficulty of putting these examination techniques into a clinical context.

Victor and Lilly Dubowitz set out to remedy this deficit and they have succeeded brilliantly. Over the years they have used each schema, selected the items they found most useful, rejected others, and compiled a neurological examination that takes 10-15 minutes, requiring little expertise, but which can be applied at different gestational ages. The candour of close personal observation rings from each page; although each individual item has been evolved elsewhere, there is clearly nothing here that has not been thoroughly tested by them in many different settings.

The advent of ultrasound, brain stem cortical evoked potentials, and the CT scan has provided a great opportunity to test clinico-pathological correlates in life. The Dubowitzs have given us a tool which will advance this another stage and have themselves made a start in demonstrating the relationship between intraventricular blood and a tight popliteal angle. They rightly stress the value of sequential examinations, inferring that the predictive value of these will fit less in one pattern of findings than in their evolution over time.

This book should become a classic, and it will be indispensable in all cases where the welfare of the newborn is under serious consideration.

R O ROBINSON

Pediatric Endocrinology. Edited by J-C Job and M Pierson. (Pp. 739; illustrated + tables. £63.00 hardback.) Wiley: New York. 1981.

The long-standing famine of textbooks on paediatric endocrinology now seems likely to be replaced by a glut. This is a