Book reviews

Paediatric Neurology. Edited by E M Brett. Pp 613: £45.00 hardback. London and New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1983.

Oh, what a lovely book! Beautifully produced, excellently illustrated, and written with enviable style it is representative of British medical writing at its best. Here is paediatric neurology described from long experience and with deep consideration in a book of great maturity. It is a large and comprehensive account of the subject with facts a plenty for use, as presumably it will most often be used, as a work of reference; but it is also a book for just reading because the stroma around the facts is rich in the philosophy and ethos of the children's physician. From the fun of making a game out of testing knee jerks to the deeply felt tragedy of progressive muscle disease the book is replete with clinical experience and wisdom. I find it difficult to imagine a more moving ending to a chapter on Duchenne dystrophy than this: 'Life for these boys will be short, but it need not be brutish. "The wonder of the world, the beauty and the power, the shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades; these I saw. Look ye also while life lasts".'

Dr Brett has written 17 of the 24 chapters himself (two of them in collaboration). There is, therefore, an overall uniformity of style throughout the book, though some slight unevenness is occasionally introduced by the other authors, all of whom have served the editor well. For instance, Mr H B Eckstein in a helpful chapter on myelomeningocele rather surprisingly describes alpha fetoprotein testing as 'one of the greatest medical advances in our lifetime' but omits any reference to ultrasound diagnosis or to the possibility of prevention by preconceptional vitamin supplementation; but both of these omissions are rectified by Dr C O Carter in the chapter on genetics. The late Dr W C Marshall wrote a comprehensive account of infection of the nervous system and Neil Gordon contributes a useful chapter on learning disorders in which the section heading 'learning disabilities' and reference to the 'techniques of teaching' are printer's errors almost too good to be true.

The book is up to date. Each chapter is followed by an extensive list of references many of which are to papers published as

late as 1982. The absence of an account of ultrasound diagnosis is a serious omission from the chapter on neonatal neurology which will doubtless be corrected in future editions, and the subject of birth trauma is neglected. Mistakes appear to be few. The only obvious one I found was the statement that men with the Becker type of muscular dystrophy are liable to pass the gene to only half of their daughters.

Any book used primarily for reference depends heavily on its index. Unfortunately many of the random topics I chose to look up were not listed in the index and my major plea for future editions, of which there will surely be many, is for a revision and considerable extension of the index to include problems, signs, and symptoms as well as diagnosis.

Dr Brett and his colleagues have written a book of which they can be proud. It is undoubtedly the best single volume book on paediatric neurology currently available and I cannot imagine any paediatric department being long without it. I predict that in future years 'Brett' will be to paediatric neurology what for so many years 'Brain' has been to adult neurology.

D P ADDY

Pediatric Respiratory Disorders. Edited by E Nussbaum and S P Galant. Pp 282: \$38.50 hardback. New York: Grune and Stratton, 1984.

This multiauthor text does not live up to its claims to provide a comprehensive state of the art review of respiratory disease in childhood. Nor does it provide a 'clinical approach' to the subject. Equal weight is given, in a series of chapters by different authors, to common problems such as childhood asthma and exceptionally rare problems such as hypersensitivity pneumonitis. There is a certain amount of repetition, which is unfortunate in a rather slim volume. In particular, the first chapter on the epidemiology of acute respiratory tract infections is almost completely repeated in the section on lower respiratory tract infections. A survey of the contents page reveals that the editors have a very 'disease orientated' approach, rather than the more practical and clinically valuable 'problem orientated' approach.

There are several useful reviews. The section on bronchopulmonary dysplasia (although totally divorced from a general review of neonatal respiratory diseases) is particularly good as are the chapters on cystic fibrosis, croup, and the practical guide to imaging of the respiratory system. I found the chapter on oxygen transport in prenatal and postnatal life particularly well written, although it is of virtually no practical value to the clinician.

It is disappointing to find that asthma, the disorder which presents the greatest workload to practical paediatricians, is the least well written. The section on the physiology of asthma is too compressed to be of help and contains many errors. The classification of asthma is simplistic with no attempt made to provide an understanding of the basic problem, airways hyperresponsiveness. The section on investigations provides no guidance to the place of chest radiology in the management of children with asthma, but in contrast goes to enormous detail on sputum tests.

Equally negligent is the failure to discuss the place of allergy tests in management, despite a detailed list of the types of tests which may be performed. It is, however, in the section on treatment of asthma that the worst deficiencies arise, demonstrating the out dated approach to management which still exists in the United States.

This book compares most unfavourably with the recent edition of *Respiratory Illness in Children* by Phelan, Landau, and Olinsky. The latter provides a much more clinically realistic and well argued guide to the management of respiratory disease. The text edited by Nussbaum and Galant is unlikely to help either the postgraduate working for a higher qualification or the expert in the field of paediatric respiratory disease.

M SILVERMAN

Introduction to Radiology in Clinical Pediatrics. By J O Haller and T L Slovis. Pp 206: £26.00 hardback. Chicago, London: Year Book Medical Publishers, 1984.

I have never seen a book that had so many