

Book reviews

If A Child Cries . . . Collected papers of John Apley. Edited by A G Apley. Pp 214: £9.95 hardback. London: Butterworths, 1984.

Fifteen years ago when John Apley invited me to join him in a writing venture I replied that I would love to work with him and that I thought I could be useful because I probably had 'the right amount of admiration and misgivings about him and his work'. It was an impetuous and ill considered comment for a junior to make to a senior paediatrician whom I did not know well, and he was the wrong sort of person to make it to. When I met him a few weeks later he said he was glad I would work with him but that he did not altogether understand my comment—and nor did I. Nor do I 15 years later, and yet the same conflicting emotions arise after reading his collected papers.

Although the papers have been edited by his brother they were assembled by John himself during his final illness. I am glad that he will have found some happiness during a depressing fatal illness looking through articles which he says he 'enjoyed writing at the time and still enjoys rereading' (and I trust that he had a glass of good wine in his hand as he did it). There can be few medical writers with such an absolute right to gloat at their own work for parts are very, very good. Yet, assembling the best of one's written work together for publication is rather like writing one's own obituary. No good item will be omitted but there is a danger that it may lack other aspects that make the person live in the memory. Without the wrinkles and the warts the picture becomes a Botticelli rather than a Rembrandt, and it is the latter who would have portrayed John Apley best.

The articles selected reflect his love of language; he was proud of his proficiency with words and gloried in it. He realised his good fortune in acquiring that love and skill early in life, since those who set about it late 'will never enjoy the bouquet and resonances of language or will ever use words dazzlingly, as an English poet or an Irish taxi driver does'. I know of no paediatrician with greater knowledge of, or skill at, the craft of writing. His sentences have a grace and a balance and are meant to be read at leisure and for pleasure.

The title is taken from one of his many aphorisms 'if a child cries it is my fault'. It is a marvellous maxim for a paediatrician to try to observe, though probably it could only have been devised by one who himself did not have children. Aphorisms abound. 'Emotional underfeeding can lead to physical undernutrition', 'Sweets are calories in the nude', 'Dead or alive, sick or well children are not just mini adults', 'Anxiety like courage is contagious'. The medical articles are peppered with such phrases and, though usually apt, they sometimes detract from the flow of thought and feeling. His style is immensely ornamental: it is a very decorated English.

It is perhaps the nice distinction between artifice and artificial that disturbs. John Apley took immense care about his writing: each piece went through many drafts. He consulted his numerous dictionaries and took a punctilious pride in appropriate punctuation. Writing a chapter with him was a wonderful lesson. Yet I was always slightly uneasy; or was it guilt? He did not always remember the many different reasons why people wrote; and that some wrote from a great need to express something they cared about, to dispose of thoughts that made them restless, to be rid of distraction and to sleep. I had written a draft chapter fast and furiously with my usual idiosyncratic punctuation and construction. After scanty correction it was sent post haste to John that it might be discussed together with other chapters the next weekend. I remember with embarrassment that weekend in a Leamington hotel; he liked the first draft chapter best of all and said he could see how much trouble I had taken about the piece and that he could always tell when a person took their writing through many different drafts revising each one carefully, as he did! I still don't know whether he was the deceived tutor or the tactful deceiver.

In the first third of the book are his articles about writing. The rest is taken up with medical writing of one sort or another. He has left out his early medical articles which he says are not of much interest—though I would have been interested to see them. There appear the famous papers on recurrent abdominal pain and on psychosomatic illness with which many people will associate him. I am unclear why those papers no longer excite. I suspect that it is

because the message is familiar, perhaps over familiar nowadays, and that people who have been trained by teachers who always made it clear that pain need not have an organic cause will not find these papers exciting; but they will find them a rewarding and delightful read.

There is an article on the pleasures of medical speaking and it is intriguing to read of his delight in speaking for though I only heard him give one formal lecture, I didn't find him a great speaker; despite rich language and abundant aphorism there was a shortage of passion and purpose for a presentation that would have come better from the page than from the platform.

The book displays John Apley in full plumage. Those who knew and admired him will enjoy it and the memories recreated; those who did not will learn; and some will wonder.

ROY MEADOW

Congenital Hypothyroidism. Edited by J H Dussault and P Walker. Pp 473: £32.50 hardback. New York: Marcel Dekker, (London: Butterworths), 1984.

This monograph is part of a series of volumes on basic and clinical endocrinology. It is divided into four main sections on maturation of thyroid physiology, screening for congenital hypothyroidism, classification of congenital hypothyroidism, and treatment.

The contribution by Morreale de Escobar and colleagues on 'Thyroid Hormone and the Developing Brain' is outstanding. A clear account of normal brain development is given, followed by a description of the use of animal models to study brain damage in experimental hypothyroidism. The different timing of neurodevelopmental events relative to birth in the human and experimental animals is rightly emphasised. The chapter ends with a short section of the effect of excess thyroid hormone on the developing brain.

The section on screening is most disappointing. To discuss congenital hypothyroidism of the prescreening era, the pros and cons of screening by thyroxine or thyroid stimulating hormone estimation, and cost-benefit analysis of screening now seems to be of historical interest only and

largely irrelevant. The interested reader will find more information in the proceedings of two international meetings already held for neonatal thyroid screening.

There is a comprehensive review of sporadic congenital hypothyroidism by Foley. The contribution of Delange *et al* on transient hypothyroidism is extensive and contains useful messages. Sick, usually preterm infants and iodine deficiency seem to be the prerequisites for this syndrome. The list of possible drug and environmentally induced causes of neonatal hypothyroidism discussed by Walfish is most valuable. I was astounded to learn that in an area of severe iodine deficiency, such as Zaire, the incidence of congenital hypothyroidism is 500 times higher than in Europe and North America.

The final section on treatment is also a disappointment. Considerable effort is expended to illustrate how unreliable are the clinical symptoms and signs of congenital hypothyroidism—surely a fact that is fully appreciated and has been acted on for nearly 10 years now by the introduction of mass screening programmes. I was hoping to be educated on the psychological and neurological development in treated infants, but sadly this topic was discussed in a cursory manner. Perhaps this, more than any other part of the monograph, illustrated that the editors could have done better had they spread their net further to encompass other groups of workers who have made important contributions to the subject of congenital hypothyroidism. Paediatricians and endocrinologists working on neonatal hypothyroid screening programmes will find parts of this monograph valuable; I would not advocate it to a wider readership.

I A HUGHES

Antimicrobial Therapy for Newborns. 2nd ed. By G H McCracken and J D Nelson. Pp 234: \$24.50 hardback. New York: Grune and Stratton, 1983.

Antibiotics and treatment of infection in the newborn have moved a long way in five years. This is reflected in the updating of this well known book which contains a great deal of new information. The overall format has not changed and the book is compact and easily read. Half the book deals systematically with each antibiotic, with much personal data included in this gathering together of the published reports on the pharmacology, dosing, and side

effects of the drugs. The second half of the book covers rapid diagnosis and the treatment of the specific infections, for example meningitis. Finally there are short but well balanced discussions on difficult practical problems—the acquisition of resistant flora, the role (or lack of) of prophylactic antibodies, and the management of outbreaks of infection in a neonatal unit.

Inevitably the data cannot be up to date. Only those in the field can name, for instance, all the cephalosporins on trial in neonatal units in this country alone, and not all of these are mentioned in the book. The most recent papers quoted are from 1982 and the results of the latest collaborative trial comparing ampicillin and amikacin against moxalactam, are not yet known. Finally, one must remember that the book is for the American market and written about infections in America.

Nevertheless, in the field there are none better, and anyone working in neonatal care would do well to read this book, to learn about the advantages and disadvantages of the antibiotics available, and to ensure rational use in their neonatal unit.

J G BISSENDEN

Asthma in Childhood. By A D Milner. Pp 66: £1.50 paperback. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1984.

This small book crams an immense amount of concisely written information into its 66 pages and, writing from the admittedly inexperienced viewpoint of parent of a 9 year old daughter recently diagnosed as asthmatic, I would recommend it to the parents of any asthmatic child.

By means of a simple but effective question and answer format the author gives a clear general picture of both the symptoms and possible causes of asthma with a brief but helpful look at the highly complex subject of allergies. The various tests used to diagnose asthma are described, as are their purposes, and a comprehensive breakdown of the various drugs and courses of treatment currently available is given, together with helpful comments on possible side effects. The great majority of these drugs are remarkably safe and effective and can be used over long periods; however the author also includes a reassuring paragraph on the controlled occasional use of systemic steroids.

Unconventional methods of treatment such as homeopathy, herbal remedies,

and hypnosis are briefly touched on, as are the use of ionisers and humidifiers. Professor Milner is not in general convinced of their efficacy but recognises the fact that they have been known to prove useful in some cases. The importance of a calm, unworried attitude on the part of the parents is constantly stressed: the contents of this book should do much to ensure that this attitude is entirely unforced and genuine.

SARAH GLEADE

Disorders of the Respiratory Tract in Children. 4th ed. By E L Kendig and V Chernick. Pp 968: £75.00 hardback. London: W B Saunders, 1983.

The previous edition of this book was published in 1977. In the last seven years there have been many changes in our approach to respiratory problems, particularly in the neonatal period, so this new edition is not before its time. The main format is unchanged, although there is new blood among the authors and nine new topics have been covered including pulmonary complications of gastro-oesophageal reflux, immotile cilia syndrome, Legionnaire's disease, and the sudden infant death syndrome. As before, the first section covers the anatomical and physiological development of the lung; examination, diagnostic and treatment procedures, lung function testing, and the effects of age. The next section, on respiratory intensive care, is relatively brief and followed by 90 pages on neonatal respiratory problems including congenital abnormalities. The viral and bacterial infections are grouped together. The fifth section comprises non-infective problems including asthma, emphysema, fibrosing alveolitis, and reflux. Diseases which also have effects outside the lung are discussed in the remaining third of the book.

Many of the sections are disappointing and have been dealt with far better in individual texts elsewhere. This is particularly true of the chapters on lung physiology, intensive and neonatal care, and the more common respiratory problems including asthma and cystic fibrosis. The book's strength lies in the fact that it is comprehensive and will be an invaluable reference source for those caring for children with obscure lung diseases. It is apparent from the bibliography that it has had a relatively long gestation; none of the references are for papers written after