

Spring books

Personal choice D P Addy

Ten past ten. Cold night. November. Nursing 'flu. Telephone. The editor. Wants to start a new kind of book review. Will I write about books I've bought, begged, received or otherwise acquired in the last few months, years, or, indeed, ever? (He actually said the last five years but I've never understood why author's licence should be restricted to poets.) What use have I made of them?

Well, I don't often buy textbooks. If all the sellers of medical textbooks kept in business by the personal spending of people like me were to be counted, there wouldn't be enough to form one half of a boxing match. I did, as an act of loyalty to the cause, buy the BPA Diamond Jubilee book *Child Health in a Changing Society* but at the risk of being court martialled by the BPA Council, I must admit that I haven't enjoyed it as much as Dick Smithells did. The books I do buy are often not work books and therefore not useful in that sense. I bought the new American reprint of the 1892 edition of Osler's *Principles and Practice of Medicine* which looks very smart on my bookshelf alongside Harvey Cushing's *Life of Osler* and makes an interesting 'dip-in' from time to time. Did you know, for instance, that Osler referred to typical breath holding attacks under the heading Spasmodic Laryngitis and confused it with the laryngeal spasms of rachitic tetany? His recommended treatment for difficult cases was a warm bath several times a day during which the back and chest was to be thoroughly sponged for a minute or two with cold water. During an attack, though, the cold water was better 'dashed into the child's face'. How often the first remedy led to a need for the second, he did not say.

A few Christmases ago my wife gave me the Keynes Press issue of William Pickles' beautiful little book *Epidemiology in a Country Practice*. Now there's a real gem of a book if ever there was one; general practice and genuine research in Wensleydale in the 1930s; a sort of intellectual, up market, medical James Herriot. Its main usefulness is to be lent to friends for their holiday delight.

Apart from the usual memory jogging and dose checking pocket books, one of the books I refer to most is Professor Peter Harper's *Practical Genetic Counselling* which I find extremely useful for checking modes of inheritance and the sort of simple genetic counselling I feel able to do without reference to a geneticist. My own particular clinical interests lead me to refer fairly frequently to Edward Brett's *Paediatric Neurology* and to Swaiman and Wright's now aging two volume *Practice of Pediatric Neurology*.

The editor told me that one of his favourites has been Niall O'Donohoe's *Epilepsies of Childhood* and I too have had more than my money's-worth out of it over the years. The books on epilepsy I now find most invaluable are *Epileptic Syndromes in Infancy, Childhood, and Adolescence* by Roger, Dravet, Bureau, Dreifus, and Wolf, which I was given, and Jean Aicardi's *Epilepsy in Children* which I bought. I wouldn't like to try to manage without either of them now.

I have an almost continuous series of *Yearbooks of Pediatrics* going back to 1959. I find them useful for reference, though I no longer read each new edition quite as assiduously as I used to. The inclusion of a cumulative five year index in the 1987 Yearbook was very useful and is an idea well worth the consideration of other publications. Another extremely valuable quick reference source is, of course, the annual bibliography of *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*.

The only general paediatric textbook I've ever owned is Sir Wilfrid Sheldon's *Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* which I bought as a student. I refer as necessary to the usual British and American multiauthor tomes in the hospital library and I subscribe to the *BMJ*, *Archives*, *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, and *Epilepsia*.

It's just struck me that there are a lot of books on my shelves that I never use. 'Books that are no earthly use to anybody' would certainly be a novel book review section, but we mustn't be too hard on authors, they're a hard working bunch and we reap as we sow.