The fund is administered by a committee which is chaired by Professor Dame Barbara Clayton. Applications for grants for the following purposes will be considered: (1) to help laboratory workers to attend meetings in the UK or abroad. (2) To support the travel of laboratory workers to recognised institutions to learn techniques. For the latter purpose priority would be given to applications from junior workers. (3) To support meetings on paediatric laboratory medicine in the UK. The support could be: (a) a contribution to a meeting on paediatric laboratory medicine or (b) sponsorship of a special lecture or session relevant to paediatric medicine organised as part of a larger meeting.

For further details and application form please write to me, Fund Secretary, at the address shown below.

J B HOLTON
Department of Clinical Chemistry,
Southmead Hospital,
Westbury-on-Trym
Bristol BS10 5NB

AUTUMN BOOKS

Whenever I read a book review I am reminded of my guilty secret: as a clinical student I spent not a penny on textbooks, excluding the 7/6d demanded by my medical school library to replace a copy of *Aids to Anatomy* stolen by an expectant, but doubtless disappointed, burglar.

My guilt is not because I am afraid I might be ill informed but because authors deserve better than to have their work unrecognised. The only way to assuage it is to persuade others to read while begging and borrowing cash to replenish the ward library. There is no longer any time to wade personally through a textbook, unless it be about resource initiatives or contracting; it may not even be necessary to read these if you borrow your infant child's copy of Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

Those whom I most frequently try to persuade are the senior house officers. All of mine are expected to become general practitioners. It has long been a custom of that trade to demand assessments of its trainees which are in strict non-confidence. Many of us find it awkward to criticise in print a senior house officer who will remain working with us for several months. After a time I become ashamed of my own euphemisms but at least there is one area where criticism can be unbounded. One of the standard assessment questions refers to the trainees' reading habits. One cannot know what goes on in the privacy of their hospital cells between bleep calls but I doubt if much serious reading goes on except in preparation for diploma exams.

Before they leave for the outside world I suggest four books in which they should invest personally. Firstly, a large multiauthor textbook to keep at the phoneside so that as general practitioners they can be one step ahead of their patients or as registrars, of their house officers. Whether homegrown or trans-

atlantic I leave to their whim. Secondly, now that many postparturients stay in hospital for so little time a pocket neonatal paperback is vital. Thirdly, a work that details useful practice in screening and surveillance which, I should point out, will pay for itself many times over—financially as well as sapientially. Finally, and this is the one I will breathlessly tell Sue Lawley will accompany me to my island retreat, no-one should practice children's medicine without a copy of the late Ronald Illingworth's *Common Symptoms of Disease in Childhood*.

HARVEY MARCOVITCH
Consultant paediatrician

Recent Advances in Paediatrics 9. Edited by T J David. (Pp 256; £19.95 softback.) Churchill Livingstone, 1990. ISBN 0-443-04304-3.

For practical purposes medical knowledge is now infinite and has a half life of about a decade. The central dilemma for its disciples, therefore, especially in as wide a discipline as paediatrics, is to keep abreast of the knowledge they need. Many scan the periodicals with remarkable diligence but much of their content is merely the gossip of medical science and shrinks to invisibility when the necessary correction factor for contemporary research is applied. Others have faith in the electronic revolution and can absorb only preprocessed byte sized morsels but these will remain digestible only to addicts until our race evolves a serial or parallel port. The best medium for conveying knowledge and stimulating thought is the short essay reviewing a topic on which the author has thought long and hard and has sifted and organised the knowledge available. A collection of such essays should be well printed, light enough for the lap, cheap enough for the pocket, and enclosed in a fluid resistant cover. This volume meets these preliminary criteria, so what of the contents?

There are 12 essays covering bacterial meningitis, primary immunodeficiency, constipation, short stature, diabetes mellitus, developments in ear, nose, and throat surgery, infants of drug dependent mothers, the thermal environment of sleeping babies, the symptoms and signs of illness in infants, respiratory distress syndrome, support after sudden infant death, and cows' milk allergy. In a final chapter, the editor adds a brief telegraphic review of the paediatric literature of 1989.

This is a good selection, including six general paediatric and six neonatal/infantile topics and apparently working on the principle of something old, something new, but nothing blue. It is a relief to be given respite from consideration of deliberate abuse of children but there are more surprising omissions. *Nothing* on genetics?! It seems at first the biological revolution has been completely ignored but, turning to the index with bated breath, there is a single reference to DNA probes.

Reflecting the principles stated above, those essays that review and update an important topic are most enjoyable and instructive. Most of these have been reviewed many times before, often by the same authors, and there is a risk of battle fatigue when old and tried warhorses are wheeled into the front line yet again. However, a discerning editor such as Dr David can judge who is not yet due for the knacker's yard. An exemplary chapter is that

by Levin and Heyderman on bacterial meningitis, in which old knowledge is consolidated and recent advances are critically appraised in the space of 19 pages. The essays on recent work are also valuable but are likely to need substantial revision in subsequent volumes. The terminal literature review seems too personal and already too dated to justify a place in such a collection.

This volume is a worthy successor in a distinguished line. Annual publication is now planned and will be warmly welcomed if such a high standard can be maintained. Paediatricians should buy the book and make time to enjoy it a chapter at a time, but beware the advice of John Dryden to '... make a short essay, then hasten to get drunk, the business of the day'.

NICK BARNES
Consultant paediatrician

Constipation in Childhood. By Graham Clayden and Ulfar Agnarsson. (Pp 123; £9.50 paperback.) Oxford University Press, 1991. ISBN 0-19-262027-4.

Despite all the recent advances in the management of childhood disorders, constipation remains very much part of the bread and butter of paediatrics, both in general practice and the hospital setting. Unfortunately, it is often inadequately or poorly treated with resultant distress for the child and family.

The aim of this book is to assist paediatricians, family doctors, and others involved in the management of children with constipation. The book starts by going into the anatomy of the anorectum and physiology of anal continence and defaecation, thus providing a scientific basis for the management strategies of constipation. This is followed by a discussion of constipation in babies, toddlers, and older children and the special problems of children with disabilities.

Most children with constipation do not require extensive investigations and therefore, quite appropriately, the chapter on the medical management of constipation precedes that on investigations. Surgical treatments are briefly discussed followed by a chapter on psychological management. The final section of the book consists of a booklet designed to be photocopied and given to parents and children.

The practical and logical approach to constipation set out by the authors should make this book compulsory reading for anybody involved in the management of constipation in childhood. It is relevant to health visitors and general practitioners, as well as paediatricians. Added attractions are the parents' booklet and the very reasonable price of this book. I would recommend that every paediatrician and general practitioner should purchase this book.

A W BOON
Consultant paediatrician

The Multi-Professional Handbook of Child Sexual Abuse. By Tilman Furniss. (Pp 357; £20 paperback.) Routledge, 1991. ISBN 0-415-05563-6.

Begin this book at the beginning. Start with the introduction where Professor Furniss warns of part 1, it 'may be difficult and dry reading'. He advises the reader to look up