Book reviews

Edited by Alfred White Franklin and Sandhya Naidoo. (Pp. x + 124; £1.05.) Invalid Children's Aid Association: London.
The Word Blind Centre for Dyslexic Children has enjoyed considerable publicity since it was established in 1963. The newspapers blossomed with accounts of undiagnosed dyslexics and increasing pressure was brought upon neurologists, educationists, and psychologists to provide facilities for the assessment and training of dyslexic children. There was an inevitable reaction to this popular outcry and professional attitudes polarized into enthusiastic belief or scepticism. In spite of a lessening of emotional tensions, misunderstandings still occur.

In response to a request from teachers, a series of lectures on dyslexia was given by the staff of the Word Blind Centre in 1969, and they have been made available in this short book. The lectures cover the problems of diagnosis, assessment, and psychological testing, and then discuss in practical detail some of the methods of training these disabled children. It is now generally accepted that true dyslexia is a relatively uncommon condition. There are thus few remedial teachers who have a sufficiently wide experience to choose the most appropriate form of treatment for these children, who present with a range of difficulties and aptitudes. These lectures provide a lively account of current methods based on first-hand experience.

IVAN T. DRAPER

There are a number of books on paediatric neurology in this format: 450-500 pages; attractively produced, with excellent illustrations—and all expensive. Neurology of Early Childhood is an expanded version of Dr. Dekaban's Neurology of Infancy and now includes child development and disease occurring up to school age. Limitations according to age are largely artificial; the exclusion of the diseases of adolescence from the sphere of paediatrics means that the infrequent occurrence of such diseases in childhood goes largely unrecognized. An exception to this rule is Huntington's chorea, which gets a generous allowance in several paediatric texts.

Neurology of Early Childhood gives an excellent review of developmental anatomy and physiology and there is a well-presented account of the maturation of the electroencephalograph. The description of the neurological examination and its interpretation is brief and orthodox. However, this section exemplifies the problems of a medium-sized textbook. For the beginner it is insufficiently detailed to be instructive, and for the expert it is scarcely necessary.

Those chapters devoted to disease states contain particularly good descriptions of the clinical disorders. The methods for reaching the correct diagnosis are less satisfactory. Almost without exception, the diseases are classified according to the underlying pathology, and the clinical presentation is considered secondarily. Thus, a child will present with the symptoms or peripheral neuropathy, yet this clinical syndrome does not warrant a separate entry in the text. Reference to the index produces 'Polyneuropathy, lead' or 'Neuropathies, Hereditary, Charcot-Marie-Tooth type, and Dejerine-Sottas type'. For a description of the neuropathies of deficiency, metabolic disorders, toxic conditions, and so on, the student requires a knowledge of all the possible primary conditions before the appropriate entry can be found.

In an effort to avoid dogmatism some of the advice is irritatingly imprecise. When discussing the prolonged use of anticonvulsants for the treatment of febrile convulsions Dr. Dekaban states that 'the decision should be made on the merits of the individual patient'. While one agrees with this wholeheartedly, the inexperienced clinician is looking for assistance on this very point. In the important chapter on epilepsy there is a valuable description of the variations in seizures at different stages of a child's development. There is little about the pathophysiology of epilepsy and the EEG records which illustrate this chapter are reproduced without any indication of the montages.

In spite of the occasional lapse when the child is referred to as 'the organism', this is a humane approach to neurology. The format is reminiscent of an old-fashioned museum, where rank upon rank of material is available although the user needs to know what he is looking for. It is a well-documented catalogue of the common and rare neurological conditions. As such, it is a useful aide-mémoire, but it is of less practical value to the beginner in paediatric neurology.

IVAN T. DRAPER

Whenever a doctor prescribes a potent drug his patient runs a risk which was negligible when pharmaceuticals had little pharmacological action. The anxiety and responsibility is increased a thousandfold when the substance has rarely if ever been given to a human being. No trials on animals can entirely eliminate the possibility of a uniquely human response especially psychological or in the special senses and the nightmares of teratogenesis or carcinogenesis are ever present. And yet animal studies may deprive us of valuable drugs. Aspirin and phenobarbital might well have been excluded if subjected to modern screening.

This valuable number of the British Medical Bulletin, edited by Professor D. R. Laurence, presents the dilemma with unusual lucidity. The papers by well-known experts in clinical, epidemiological, and industrial pharmacology should be read carefully by all who take part in clinical trials. And every prescription of a new drug is a clinical trial.

J. A. SIMPSON

This little book, No. 3 of the Workshop Series of Phar-

A full account of the rise and fall of psychosomatics will constitute one of the more intriguing chapters of post-war medicine. Originally an improbable hybrid of clinical thinking, physiological speculation and psychoanalytical theory, it was fired by the enthusiasm of what one of its more prominent representatives has acknowledged to be "a reformist movement which emphasized that 'patients are persons'." The exuberant mood of its salad days is embalmed in the proceedings of the 1949 meeting of the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Diseases on Life Stress and Bodily Disease when it was solemnly predicted that 'henceforward progress in our knowledge of the role which emotional stresses play in the course and progress of human illness will follow in an accelerated pace'. It is a prediction which has not been borne out, and the much more cautious note which was sounded in the WHO Technical Report on Psychosomatic Disorders in the early 1960s has since been echoed by many of the formerly vociferous riders on the psychosomatic bandwagon. In North America some of them already appear to have dismounted in search of other 'breakthroughs'.

What then are we to expect from a volume purporting to indicate modern trends in psychosomatic medicine? In his chapter on functional vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea the editor refers to these conditions as 'a paradigm of psychosomatic mechanisms' and specifies 'a predisposition to a particular physical reaction derived in part from inheritance, part from the learning experiences in childhood. In most of the patients we can see a current situation operating upon a vulnerable personality to produce the specific reaction'. This ambitious credo receives all-too-little support from the material presented in the majority of chapters on individual syndromes and symptoms, and one of the contributors dismisses the global view as 'merely eclecticism regarding aetiology' urging that work be concentrated on 'the relationship, between events occurring at the highest levels of central nervous system activity and changes in visceral and musculo-skeletal functions in the body, healthy and diseased'. This plea for psychophysiological studies of the mechanisms of illness can be balanced by a need for epidemiological studies of the associations of disease, as illustrated by the chapters on bereavement and duodenal ulcer. The prosecution of all such inquiries, however, can be accommodated comfortably within the framework of general psychiatry, thereby hastening the day to which the editor looks forward when he writes that 'The triumph of psychosomatic medicine will come when the term is dropped'. Meanwhile a veto might profitably be placed on the use of psychosomatic jargon: a useful start could be made, for example, with 'parenectomy'.

Mental subnormality: modern trends in research

This book, with a foreword by Professor L. S. Penrose, FRS, is published to coincide with the centenary of St. Lawrence's Hospital, Caterham, England, and all the contributors have been connected with the hospital in the past 10 years.

The editor is eminently suitable to write on modern trends in research as he is also editor of the Journal of Mental Deficiency Research and was editor of the Proceedings of the First Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency, 1967.

The book is selective in what it includes, and in consequence many subjects are omitted altogether, but what is included is dealt with extensively and authoritatively. Parts have already been published elsewhere.

Each chapter deals with a general review of the topic and then gives some detailed research, sometimes pointing out further lines for continuing study. At the end of each chapter there is an excellent bibliography. Dr. Richards himself writes the first two chapters and the last one and his style of writing is a delight to read.

Chapter 1 deals with clinical syndromes in general and in particular with two syndromes where mental deficiency and ichthyosis are associated with (1) spastic diplegia and (2) sexual infantilism, two syndromes where there is mental deficiency and deaf-mutism, with the syndromes of de Lange and Rubinstein-Taybi, and finally where mental deficiency is associated with anosmia and microphthalmia.

Chapter 2 deals with mongolism in general, in families and in mosaics.

Chapter 3, by A. T. Rundle, deals with anthropometry in general and a 10-year survey of growth and sexual maturation in detail. Mongols are treated as a separate group.

Chapter 4, by Beate Hermelin and N. O'Connor, and Chapter 5, by P. E. Bryant, give accounts of psychological research into arousal and patterns of learning which could lead to practical application in methods of teaching the subnormal.

Chapter 6, by A. W. Griffiths, on drug trials is accompanied by a useful and extensive Appendix of various trials of tranquilizers and anti-epileptic drugs. It recognizes that behaviour disorders and epilepsy are two of the most common problems encountered in hospitals for the mentally retarded. Three drug trials are described but the use of the trade name for sulthiame seems out of keeping with the rest of the chapter.

In Chapter 7 P. E. Sylvester describes techniques of neuropathology which do not require highly expensive laboratory equipment and gives findings relating brain weight and numbers of fibres in particular brain areas to results of IQ tests and to patients with epilepsy and cerebral palsy.