

Obstetrics: Some current problems. British Medical Bulletin, vol. 24, no. 1, January 1968. Scientific editor, S. G. CLAYTON. London. British Council. Pp. 98. Price 40s. 0d.

This issue of the British Medical Bulletin is an important review of problems uncovered by recent development and advances in obstetrics. Its 14 chapters relate to rhesus iso-immunization, folate metabolism, electrolytes, cardiovascular dynamics, diabetes, coagulation failure, jaundice, asymptomatic bacteriuria, renal failure, pituitary necrosis, ultrasonics, placental insufficiency, anaesthesia and analgesia, and mortality, all in relation to pregnancy. Obstetricians were sole authors of four and collaborated with other specialists in six; physicians wrote two, anaesthetists one, and a Ministry of Health expert contributed a section on maternal deaths. Eight chapters came from north of the Mersey-Humber line, four (and the introduction) from Liverpool; the remaining six from London. But one author has since moved from London to Bristol.

Obstetrics has developed rapidly in recent years from the simplicity of midwifery to a discipline which requires knowledge not only of obstetrics but also of physics, chemistry, biochemistry, pathology, haematology and a host of other subjects including mathematics. Its ultimate extent may appear boundless to a general practitioner confronted with seven pages of references to pituitary necrosis. Nevertheless, this review is of importance and interest to the general-practitioner as well as to the specialist obstetrician, and it is concisely and so clearly written that it can be understood without profound knowledge of the basic sciences. Although many sections deal with conditions with which most general practitioners would want specialist help, some, for instance those dealing with iso-immunization, folate metabolism, bacteriuria, placental insufficiency and analgesia provide information useful in his dealings with his own patients. Much of its content is equally valuable in other fields of medicine apart from obstetrics. It is not an essential for every general-practitioner obstetrician's bookshelf, but all should have read it, at least in part.

Pain, psychological and psychiatric aspects. H. MERSKEY and F. G. SPEAR. London. Baillière, Tindall & Cassell. 1967. Pp. 223. Price 40s. 0d.

Pain is one of the commonest symptoms which is presented to the family doctor, and while we in general practice are aware of some characteristics, we tend to take the mechanism for granted. This book jolts any complacency one may harbour on this subject. It shows very clearly that pain is an extremely complex phenomenon, and the accepted explanations are nearly always oversimplifications. The ubiquitous nature of the problem is illustrated by a quotation from Trotter who suggested that we probably all experience aches and pains every day of our lives, but these lapse from the healthy memory when not accompanied by other evidence of disease. Soldiers need narcotics for wound pain far less than civilians, although the former usually have greater injuries. For the soldier the wound represents an honourable release from danger, for the civilian it is a disaster interfering with normal life. These are only two extracts from a whole host of observations on the subject. The book is comprehensive with an exhaustive bibliography of well over 500 references. It isn't the easiest book to read, but it certainly makes one think again about a subject which is far more complicated than is generally realized. It will be a valuable reference book for anyone interested in the problem of pain.