

Book reviews

Pain relief in labour—A handbook for midwives.

DONALD D. MOIR, M.D., F.F.A.R.C.S., D.A.,
D.obst.R.C.O.G. Glasgow. Churchill Living-
stone. 1971. Pp. 140. Price £1.00.

The author of this text is very modest in offering it as a handbook for midwives only; it provides a comprehensive review of its subject and should prove valuable to many doctors both in and out of hospital. In his introduction he sketches the changing practice for midwives from the advent of Minnitt's gas and air analgesia up to the recent and more potent gas-oxygen administered with the Entonox apparatus. Incidentally Dr Minnitt was a general practitioner and only part-time anaesthetist.

The second chapter illustrates the author's sound philosophical approach. He stresses that women may still be terrified of labour and the pain. Familiarity breeds contempt, even of pain (as long as it is being suffered by another) and all of us in medicine should examine our conscience on this score from time to time. He emphasizes that her attendants should do nothing to destroy the patient's faith in her chosen regim; that painless labour should never be promised; that the pharmacological and psychological approach to pain relief should be complementary; and that the risk of maternal mortality is increased because high-risk anaesthetics are often delegated to junior doctors.

The next chapter displays a healthy rejection of rigid attitudes and rules; the presence of her husband at labour and his contribution to his wife's peace of mind is encouraged. The confidence engendered by familiar surroundings and known attendants is underlined where the author comments on the relatively easy and painless labours characteristic of many home confinements and also in those which occur in general-practitioner maternity units, although we are reminded that these are the situations in which the more normal labours should take place.

There is a wealth of practical detail in the chapters which follow; details of drugs, their dosages; techniques of administration; and the hazards of drug interaction. The notes on equipment are valuable; simple and highly practical, especially in the case of apparatus for inhalation. Some of the new guarded needles which are used for pudendal and para-cervical block are illustrated. Doctors who are frequently obliged to work without the assistance of an anaesthetist will find much profit in this section.

On one point the author's confident assertion might be challenged. This is in his section headed

'Amnesia' in which he rejects the idea that "the suffering of pain is of small importance, provided that the patient retains no conscious memory of her suffering". The greatest risk from painful labour is that it will have an adverse effect on the woman's attitude to future childbearing and to her marriage. If there is no memory of pain this risk is obviated, and there does seem to be a real distinction here between amnesia and suppression of a disagreeable memory. There is some safeguard for the patient in methods of analgesia which do not suppress all sensation and reaction. The operator will proceed with greater caution than in the case of the anaesthetized fully relaxed patient.

Without hesitation this book is recommended to every general-practitioner obstetrician.

Mental illness in childhood. V. L. KAHAN. London.
Tavistock Publications. 1971. Pp. xix+219.
Price £3.

Mental health of adolescents and young persons.
(Public Health Papers No. 41). A. R. MAY,
M.B., F.R.C.P., D.P.M.; JACK H. KAHN, M.D.,
D.P.M.; BÖRGE CRONHOLM, M.D. Geneva.
World Health Organization. 1971. Pp. 72.
Price \$19.5.

The care and treatment of children suffering from emotional disturbance or mental illness is not a field of medicine in which enthusiasm can be fanned by great leaps forward, or the heart uplifted by dramatic cures. Progress is slow and minuscule, and the great triumphs are when after long months of care and treatment a child may perhaps echo one word, or cease to urinate quite so frequently on the floor, or perhaps move from his long-accustomed place on the mantelpiece to the centre of the room. Most of us would find this sphere of practice to be hard and unrewarding. Not so Dr Kahan and his staff.

In this book are recorded the methods, and some of the results, achieved in six years at West Stowell House. Here grossly disturbed or damaged children are admitted—not to a hospital—but to small family groups under the care of house-parents who provide a home atmosphere for the child while educational and therapeutic processes are carried on. Child-centred intensive care is the keynote, and each child is accepted at the emotional level at which he is operating, so that he may re-start that development from the age at which it was arrested. The chronological age of the child is forgotten. If a boy of six