



BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEW



THE NEXT GENERATION

Lives of third world children
Judith Ennew and Brian Milne
Zed Books, London (1990)
226 pages. Price £7.95 (p/b)

A few years ago, this book might have been considered unnecessary reading for British general practitioners. Sadly, with the growing numbers of adolescents sleeping rough on city streets, and with child abuse never far from the headlines, it has a message for us all.

It is an enormously interesting and readable book written by two Cambridge social anthropologists. They begin by listing the 10 principles in the United Nations declaration of the rights of the child (1959) and in each case describe how reality has sadly failed the good intentions. This year, however, a legally binding document (the convention on the rights of the child) is to be ratified by member states who then commit themselves to implementation. This international treaty covers a surprisingly wide area of children's rights, from basic health and freedom, to protection from exploitation, media responsibility, nursery care and much more.

It is a sad fact that, despite cheap and effective remedies, five million children die from diarrhoea each year and that half the world's children are not immunized. In the second part of the book, the authors give short accounts of life for the child in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, covering aspects of health and social conditions. Each account is punctuated by vivid short case histories. White, western, middle-class perceptions are questioned, and children in prisons, children in armed combat and child workers are discussed.

Half of the world's population are children and the way society views 'those who are our future' is a fundamental theme throughout the book. This is an important book and I would recommend it to all who are concerned with 'the next generation'.

DOROTHY E LOGIE
General practitioner, Melrose, Borders

LOCAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Is partnership possible?
Michael Bayley, Rosalind Seyd and Alan Tennant
Gower, Aldershot (1989)
196 pages. Price £25.00

I thoroughly recommend this excellent book, particularly as an introduction for trainees. Newly qualified doctors have rarely been taught anything about community social services, and though most general practitioners eventually get some working knowledge of how these operate in their own areas, this is usually obtained in hand-to-mouth manner and all too often results in ignorance of the help which social workers can give our patients.

As with our own work, this help is often deficient, not because responsible professionals do not care, but because resources are inadequate and objectives are poorly or wrongly defined.

Health economists often assert that resources will always be both finite and less than we need. This book shows the infinite resources available in the people we serve and the communities of which they and we are a part, not as theory but as fumbling practice in a real place. Unlike many texts purporting to cover the same ground, it is entirely free from sociological jargon, admits the great difficulties faced by anyone actually working in the field, and avoids blaming either professionals or target populations for their failures to deliver gallons out of pint pots.

At the 1990 Spring meeting of the Royal College of General Practitioners in Harrogate, there were stalls for three banks but not a single display from a medical bookshop or publisher, a sad fact which tells us something about ourselves. Books are necessary food for imagination. This one could set many practices on new paths entirely.

JULIAN TUDOR HART
General practitioner, Glyncorrwg, West Glamorgan

SWEET FA

The autobiography of Alun Peredur Jones who suffers from Friedrich's ataxia an inherited disease
Brynglass, Bromley, Kent (1989)
151 pages. Price £4.00

Those who read this short autobiography in the hope of discovering what it is really like to suffer from Friedrich's ataxia will perhaps be disappointed. Alun Peredur Jones, who has this inherited disease, demonstrates through his stoicism the essential duality of our existence, the ability of body and soul to say no to one another. His noble and enlightened character is able to separate his buoyant spirit from his frail complaining body. Like Seneca he finds happiness in having succeeded in enduring events the actual enduring of which was very far from pleasant.

Because of his poor vision, the author was unable to write in his native Welsh and so dictated the text to his wife who spoke only English. In general it is a misguided endeavour to write as one speaks; but the text, with its demotic colloquialisms, its Welshness and its naturalness has a style which is original and one that has freely grown from deep within the author. We see, therefore, Alun Peredur Jones and not simply an author.

The story, not surprisingly, is coloured by his experience of living in a remote slate-mining community, Blaenau Ffestiniog, where life is hard and the landscape bleak. Taking this and his incurable disease Jones could have created his own form of bleak Welsh pastoral, thickly streaked by indignation. Instead, happily, we accompany him to lands of sultry sun, Bacardi, strange food and exotic women; an entertaining journey with surprises