
Medical Genetics

The staff and students of Duke University School of Medicine deserve the thanks of the medical profession, practising physicians as well as medical students, for having persuaded Professor Snyder to publish in book form a series of lectures on medical genetics which he presented to the Medical Schools of Duke University. Wake Forest College and the University of North Carolina. They have rightly felt that the way Professor Snyder has chosen to give information on the subject is unique. They might have expected beforehand, as most medical men do, to be presented with the results of crossing experiments with plants and animals and their highly hypothetical bearing on human beings, with statistical findings and a mass of mathematical formulas. They might have thought of medical genetics as a branch of science quite apart from every-day medicine. Readers of the book, however, will be amazed by the fact, as obviously have been the audiences of the lectures, that the material is truly medical, with no elaborate introduction dealing with genetic "theories," no mention of Drosophila or other experimental material, and no "statistical data."

The book from its first pages deals with practical problems, with the application of genetics to medical conditions, and with questions the highly important bearing of which even the youngest medical student understands. The medico-legal applications of genetics, the genetic background of mental disorders, of disease, of abnormalities of the eye and ear, of the skeleton, of the muscles, of the blood and of diatheses are among the main points discussed. In giving the present status of our knowledge of the genetic factors concerned in these conditions, the author does not fail to outline critically the important role which environmental factors play in modifying the expression of hereditary traits in man. Since human beings are given the opportunity to control to a large extent their environment, a change is offered to the physician of the future to control, by a knowledge of the interaction of the factors involved, the expression of certain traits in man by providing suitable environments in certain cases.

The author summarizes in excellent systematic tables what is known of the hereditary nature and the mode of transmission of many groups of diseases and abnormal conditions. In these tables are tabulated as well those conditions about which nothing genetic is known at present, in such a way as to set off the genetic conditions in proper perspective in the whole field of medicine. In addition to its many advantages thus far discussed, the book provides the reader with a fine source of genetic orientation of value to the busy medical man. Carefully chosen family histories illustrating the main kinds of genetic behavior, and some good photographs of rare genetic conditions make the book even more readable.—*F. Blank, M.D.*

Medical Genetics, by Laurence H. Snyder. x+130 pp. Durham, N. C., Duke University Press, 1941. $1.50.