M. Rechcigl (ed.): World Review of Nutrition and Dietetics. Food, Nutrition and Health, vol. 16. The editor of this volume must be congratulated on having found so many authors – most of them very competent – to deal with the complex science of nutrition. All its aspects can be discussed only by specialists from various disciplines: physiology and biochemistry of nutrition, food science, agriculture, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine and, last but not least, economy and sociology, etc. The ‘magnum opus’ has become an interesting textbook and – as it has been conceived principally as a reference tool – a useful source of literature. At the end of each of the 15 chapters, written by specialists in their respective fields, the reader will find an exhaustive list of reference, and in addition to this list, as part IV of the book, a separate bibliography of almost 50 pages. But French and Spanish speaking readers will certainly be a bit disappointed to find within this selected bibliography only English and some German works and almost none in their own language.

Praise becomes more convincing if one adds some criticism. The referee agrees with the editor when he says in the preface: ‘A modest degree of overlap has been deliberately introduced.’ This would be even more useful if references had been made to the respective chapters or pages. But, if overlapping becomes controversial, the reader will become a bit confused. What is kwashiorkor? ‘It results from deficiency of protein in the presence of adequate or even excess caloric intake’ (McLaren, p. 147) or as Gopalan says (p. 100): ‘Kwashiorkor could occur even if the dietary intake of protein appears adequate, but the caloric intake is deficient to a considerable extent and the widespread protein malnutrition is secondary to caloric deficiency.’

Reading the chapters ‘Undernutrition’ and ‘Overnutrition’ one finds the former treated in all its aspects, but in the latter – somewhat unbalanced – long descriptions of hypervitaminosis and mineral overload. There are just a few pages dealing with excess caloric intake and nothing about overnutrition with fatty acids, carbohydrates – especially low molecular – and an eventual danger of too high an intake of proteins or single amino acids.

A little disappointing too is the very important chapter ‘Prospects for improving world food supply and nutrition’. The Green Revolution has been described but nothing about new food sources, e.g., mixtures of vegetable proteins, single cell proteins, etc. Under ‘Myths’ the author is mentioning the perverse fashion in which peasant farmers respond to economic incentives: ‘If returns per acre are increased, they will grow less wheat.’ The author means this was part of economic folklore in Asia and has now been thrown off by the Indians and Pakistanis. This view is completely unrealistic for most developing countries. Such an optimism might be correct for a small percentage of the population but most of them do not see any reason why they should grow more than is absolutely necessary. This whole chapter seems to be written too much from the point of view of the western countries.

But these limitations do not diminish appreciably the value of the whole book. Therefore, what has been said in the beginning of this review should be repeated: the whole ‘magnum opus’, as Jean Mayer wrote in his foreword is ‘a superb achievement’.

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Since 1958, when the Food and Agriculture Organization had held a ‘Nutrition Meeting for Europe’, many nutrition workers have emphasized the importance of education and training in nutrition. All of them agreed that in most schools of medicine this training is not adequate. Medical students, all medical people and physicians particularly should be kept informed of the great advances in nutritional sciences which have occurred in recent years. Other professionals concerned with nutritional problems should also know more about this field which is so important in preventive public health. But there are only a few universities where the science of nutrition is being taught and there are even less textbooks on nutrition which could serve as a basis for such a teaching.

The booklet ‘Nutrition and its disorders’ is able to fill this gap. It has been written by an author who has gained experience during 10 years of teaching nutrition in a medical school. The first section ‘Normal nutrition’ (96 pp.), gives the details of body and food composition and basic facts of physiology and biochemistry of nutrition. In two sections, primary (84 pp.) and secondary (68 pp.) nutritional disorders have been described. A short concluding section deals with nutritional problems in the community (field studies, assessment of nutritional status, dietary evaluation, etc.). In his judgement, how important he estimates nutrition for the well-being of people. He is quoting the old British poet George Herbert: ‘Whosoever was the father of a diseases, an ill diet was the mother.’

As a professor for Human Nutrition in Beirut the author puts his main emphasis on nutritional problems in developing countries. But he also describes the importance of correct nutrition in technically developed countries by discussing the correlation between nutrition and cardiovascular diseases, obesity and some environmental factors.

Not only medical people but many others concerned with human health and welfare will find nutritional aspects of their disciplines covered in the booklet and could learn a lot from it. McLaren’s booklet can be highly recommended.

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