

## Book Reviews

### FAMILY PLANNING

#### A Textbook of Contraceptive Practice

By John Peel and Malcolm Potts. Pp. xiii+297. (Cambridge University Press: London, July 1969.) 50s; \$8.50.

THIS is a realistic book, as one would expect when the joint authors are a sociologist and a doctor with scientific background who is now medical secretary to the International Planned Parenthood Federation. It is intended for doctors and comes at a time when the medical profession is at last willing to learn something about the subject, having until now reluctantly dragged behind public opinion on family planning and abortion issues, while claiming to have the last word because they are medical problems.

The stable population rates in the West have happened largely by chance. The practice of family planning by middle class couples arose out of economic motives: they used what they could find out about and what was available. The pioneers of the birth control movement, who opened clinics and began to investigate scientifically the question of fertility control, had to do so against the resistance of the medical profession. Before the advent of the pill and the IUD in this decade, a minority of couples got contraceptive advice from their own general practitioners and obstetricians, many did so from the hundreds of family planning clinics (staffed by women doctors) which mushroomed after the war, but the great majority used methods which did not require medical advice. The advent of the pill and the IUD came at a time when sexual attitudes and morals were being questioned and openly discussed. These new methods brought increased efficiency and were acceptable to a lot of people who had not found anything satisfactory hitherto. The public were ready for them before the medical profession, who were hustled by the demands of their patients into overcoming their prejudices, helped by the "medical" nature of these new methods which soon proved much more acceptable to the doctors than previous ones had been.

The authors trace the history of attitudes towards family planning and the methods used, and then provide a subsequent realistic appraisal of each of the methods in use today, throwing overboard, as they do so, many of the old wives' tales and prejudices which still persist. The risks of the pill are put into perspective (one cigarette daily is three times as dangerous to life as one pill daily), and the authors rightly point out that the risks from pregnancy are higher than the risks from the pill, which is the only method which gives no involuntary pregnancies; indeed, adding up all the pregnancies which result from birth control failures, they conclude that the pill saves lives.

There are some mistakes; for example, they equate mg dosage with potency in their table of oral contraceptives on page 97. Although the two available oestrogens have approximately the same potency, this is by no means so for all the nine progestagens; for example, 'Ovulen' with 1 mg ethynodiol diacetate is as potent as 'Gynovlar' with 3 mg norethisterone acetate (and has twice the oestrogen content) but it is shown as having one third of the potency.

World population problems are discussed and an interesting account of social, cultural and religious influences

which affect the size of family and the use of birth control is given. This underlines the kind of problems that exist in attempting to solve the population explosion—how to get people motivated to use family planning when so recently high death rates have kept families small and the need has been to promote family wealth with as many pairs of hands as possible. Most of the conventional methods of birth control are quite unacceptable to people new to family planning, and the pill and the IUD have achieved great importance as methods which are acceptable. The authors, however, call for a re-appraisal of abortion (still the most common method of birth control in the world) and sterilization, and emphasize how important is the availability of many methods to give some kind of consumer choice. They also query the medical insistence on regular medical supervision for women on the pill, and the insertion of IUDs by medical personnel as being not only unnecessary but unhelpful in view of the enormity of the problem (after all, we leave midwives to deliver babies and surely they can be taught to insert IUDs, which is simpler and potentially less dangerous).

This is a good book for the doctor who desires a readable, up to date account of methods. It is guaranteed to make him re-think his role in this field.

ELEANOR MEARS

### DECLINE OF A RAPTOR

#### Peregrine Falcon Populations

Their Biology and Decline. Edited by Joseph J. Hickey. (Proceedings of an International Conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin.) Pp. xxii+596+59 plates. (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison and London, February 1969.) \$10; 95s.

THE peregrine falcon is a cosmopolitan species, which is found from Greenland to the Falkland Islands. It has been divided into twenty-two races. Peregrines have bred successfully on Salisbury Cathedral in England, the office of the Sun Life Insurance in Montreal, and the Law Courts in Nairobi, and in other cities, as well as in remote parts of the Arctic and tropical Asia and Africa. Incidentally, the photographs of peregrines and different types of their nesting sites are a valuable feature of the book.

The peregrine preys on a wide variety of organisms, but essentially it is a predator of medium-sized birds; it prefers domestic pigeons whenever they are available. It prefers to breed on high cliffs, especially when these contain seabird colonies; but when cliffs are absent it breeds in the old nests of crows and other species in trees; and where there are no cliffs or trees it lays its eggs on the ground. The mean clutch size is lowest in the Arctic (2.95) and highest in the eastern United States (3.72). If the eggs are taken the species usually lays a second clutch. Peregrines do not usually breed in their first year. Individual birds are known to have lived up to 17-20 years. Unlike the populations of many other raptorial birds, those of the peregrine are extraordinarily steady; associated with this characteristic is the peregrine's fidelity to certain nesting sites, some of which have been occupied for centuries. Much is known about the natural history of the peregrine falcon, which has excited man's interest and admiration from the earliest days and which was the principal hawk of the falconer.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s this very stable species underwent one of the most spectacular declines ever recorded in a vertebrate species: within a few years it became extinct in many parts of the north of its range as in Wisconsin, Massachusetts and south-east England, or very much rarer as in Germany and Finland. Only in Alaska and Canada was there no evidence of a catastrophic decline during this period. Destruction of eggs by the birds themselves and reduced breeding success were associated with the population changes. The sudden