Book reviews


This beautifully produced book published by the National Foundation—March of Dimes presents the proceedings of the second conference on the clinical delineation of birth defects which was held at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, in May 1969. The volume is dedicated to Frank R. Ford and it is a fitting tribute to this pioneer of paediatric neurology whose accumulated wisdom and powers of clinical description receive due acknowledgement in the dedication.

Many reports of conferences on specialized aspects of disease are disappointing. In particular when rare neurological syndromes are discussed one finds that the reports resemble a philatelic catalogue to a rather alarming extent. It is probably no accident that so many neurologists specializing in paediatrics are stamp collectors; and that some of them appear to collect rare syndromes and publish articles about them much in the same way as they would describe a rare stamp with unusual perforations or a missing water mark.

This book represents much more than a neuro-paediatric catalogue. The first seven contributions, beginning with the introduction by Dr. Victor McKusick, one of the associate editors, describe the clinical, genetic, morphological, and biochemical approaches to the study of neurological disorders, with particular reference to their classification. All these contributions are well worth reading and together present a wide ranging view of congenital abnormalities of the nervous system. Professor David Clark, for example, in spite of the fact that he admits to becoming greyer, gives a most lucid account of the part that a clinical neurologist can play in recognizing rare neurological disorders which subsequent biochemical investigation may show can be alleviated by drug or dietary treatment. Professor Becker’s chapter on ‘Genetic approaches to the nosology of nervous system defects’ gives a very clearly presented account of how a geneticist looks at neurological disease.

The three chapters on ‘Biochemical approaches to the nosology of nervous system defects’ by McKhann, Brady, and Menkes are all a little too short and should perhaps have been combined into a very much longer and more comprehensive review of the vast amount of research which has been undertaken in recent years into the biochemical abnormalities associated with congenital disease of the nervous system.

Some indication of the range of subjects covered in the Johns Hopkins Conference may be given by quoting from some of the chapter headings. These include ‘The metabolic basis of the Refsum syndrome’ by Steinberg, ‘Viral infections and malformations of the nervous system’ by Johnson, ‘Classification of cerebral malformations’ by Meyer, ‘Anencephaly and spina bifida: an etiological hypothesis’ by Nance, ‘Clinical aspects of globoid cell and metachromatic leukodystrophies’ by Hagberg (with 23 references to the condition including six of which he was author), ‘The nosology of mental retardation’ by Moser and Wolf, ‘The nosology of epilepsy’ by Schmidt, and ‘Hereditary disease of the cerebellar parenchyma’ by Weiner and Konigsmark. For good measure there are a number of short contributions describing rare syndromes such as ‘An oculocerebrofacial syndrome’, and ‘Dominant olivopontocerebellar atrophy with dementia and extrapyramidal signs’. There are also a series of interesting short case reports. The book is beautifully illustrated and printed and the ‘biographic data’ given about each author accompanied by photographs do add a certain personal interest. This book should be available for reference in any paediatric or neurological library together with the preceding volume.

T. T. S. Ingram


The Clinics in Developmental Medicine publications have twice made a major contribution to the understanding of hemiplegia occurring in childhood. Their first volume reporting the study group held at Clevedon in 1961 drew attention to the size of the problem, the many aetiological factors suggested, and the many gaps in our knowledge. This new volume, the work of the paediatric neurologist from Zurich, is a very comprehensive study of the causation and modes of presentation of hemiplegia in infancy and childhood. It is not limited to a study of the syndrome which, by common usage, has come to be known as ‘acute infantile hemiplegia’ but deals
Book reviews

927

with all those disorders of cerebral structure and function which cause a hemiplegia or a 'hemisindrome' to occur in a child. This is built from extensive study of the world literature, and from experience of 116 cases seen in and around Zurich. The conditions included cover causes such as aneurysms, angiomas, pre-natal and perinatal vascular occlusions, venous lesions, traumatic and infective lesions, direct and indirect, as well as the much discussed focal cerebral and carotid arteritis, which is so often responsible for the syndrome of acute hemiplegia with or without epilepsy both in infants and older children. Even multiple sclerosis in childhood is given a chapter.

The very nature of the work means that there is a comprehensive and very valuable bibliography, and there are no less than 86 illustrations, most of which are radiographic, and though these are unfortunately printed in positive, there are often outline sketches to clarify lesions which reproduce inadequately. The main criticism of the work is that 87 of its 314 pages are devoted to an appendix of individual case reports, which few will read, and which make the book unnecessarily long. They also show that the evidence for some of the diagnostic classifications is a little tenuous. However this need not detract from a work one can recommend to neurologists, paediatricians and radiologists alike, and the author is to be congratulated on a very painstaking study, well reported and documented, and the translator on making it sound as if it were originally written in English—by no means an easy task.

EDWIN R. BICKERSTAFF

RESEARCH AND CLINICAL STUDIES IN HEADACHE

This is the third in a series of international reviews devoted to research and clinical studies in headache. It is excellently produced and this volume again covers a wide range of contributions. Much of the book is taken up by the assessment of radiological investigations of headache by Robertson, an exhaustive review on migrainous neuralgia by Sutherland and Eadie, and the psychopathology of migraine by Bartolin. The remainder consists of 24 shorter papers on various clinical, biochemical, and therapeutic aspects of headache. The style and presentation of different parts of the book are inevitably diverse. Robertson's treatise runs to almost 100 pages while the shortest contributions are only three. The subjects range so widely that the reader might justifiably wonder why they appear in the same book. Thus there is a report on the emetic effect of biogenic amines, others on the relationship between headache and internal hyperostosis, the assessment of circadian and circatrigintan rhythms and finally a long and unconvincing appraisal of ethmoidopharectomy by Bonaccorsi. There are yet more observations on conjunctival microcirculation. The clinical papers are notable for a thoughtful review by Whitty.

Most neurologists will find something of interest here. For the clinician, Robertson's chapter which summarizes a lifetime's experience and interest in pneumoencephalography makes the book worth buying. The shorter papers must, of necessity, be of less lasting interest and this aspect is emphasized by the two years delay lapsing between the conference and publication of the proceedings. Some of the lavish presentation may in future have to be sacrificed for more rapid publication.

W. ROSS RUSSELL

DRUGS DEVELOPMENT AND CEREBRAL FUNCTION

In general, books that represent merely the papers read to one of the innumerable meetings that occupy so much of one's time these days are to be deplored. This volume is no exception. It is difficult to make out what this symposium was about. The first section is mainly about hemispherectomy: the second on cerebral blood flow measurements and atheroma; the third on EEG ontogenesis, pharmaco-electroencephalography and the effect of limbic lesions on cerebral excitability; the fourth on the use of drugs in child psychiatry; the fifth on neurochemistry (nicotine, amines and emotions, ACh pools in the brain, protein synthesis, 5-HT, and diphenylhydantoin); and the last a panel discussion on neuropsychopharmacology today.

Many individual essays are excellent material, but their unrelated juxtaposition merely leads to mental indigestion. It seems to me a book should be about something so the reader has some purpose in reading it—for example, the sections in the book on, say, the role of biogenic amines in emotion and learning, or on hemispherectomy, or on subtle EEG analyses of drug induced states should be found in books on these topics, together with other chapters on topics related to each of them. I can think of few good books in medicine that were the outcome of meetings—the Hixon Symposium for one and The Transmission of Schizophrenia for another. Symposia to be publishable have to be of a very specific form and design—notably that developed by the Neurosciences Research Program of M.I.T.—otherwise confusion reigns.

J. R. SMYTHIES
ACUTE HEMIPLEGIAS AND HEMISYNDROMES IN CHILDHOOD
Edwin R. Bickerstaff

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