BOOK REVIEWS


This book is not, as its title might imply a straightforward textbook of the autonomic nervous system. Although it opens with sections on anatomy and physiology, its main theme is the development and application to clinical medicine of the experimental work of Reilly and his colleagues in France on "irritation" of the autonomic system. These workers found that the response to intense or prolonged stimulation of autonomic nerves varies with centres different from those of the response to a less intense and more physiological stimulus or to sections of the same pathways. They named this third type of response "l'irritation nerveuse." The essence of the response was an immediate and very marked vasodilatation, which in experimental animals was often irreversible and if widespread led to death. Thus "irritation" of the diencephalon produced a generalized effect, characterized by cerebral oedema, increased respiration, hypertension, pulmonary oedema, and albuminuria or haematuria with gastro-intestinal haemorrhages. Local responses could also be elicited, e.g., as, for instance, that from splanchic nerve "irritation," which caused oedema of the gut with swelling and haemorrhage from Peyers patches, and albumin or sometimes blood in the urine. In these autonomic responses the authors of this book see possible mechanisms for the signs and symptoms of many bodily diseases. The major part of the book consists of collagen disease processes, both local and general, with these responses; and in this connexion allergy and anaphylaxis, nephritis, gastric ulceration, asthma, coronary disease, and the acute manifestations common to severe zymotic diseases are all discussed.

The conception of pathways and centres in the central nervous system, which may mediate some of the manifestations of all disease, has already been explored to some extent by Speransky; and the book under review, though limited to the autonomic system, is reminiscent of his approach. The idea has a logic of its own, since the nervous system shares with the blood the attribute of supplying every tissue in the body.

This book should certainly be read by those interested in the mechanics of disease processes. The authors have gathered together a large number of interesting facts, many of them, the result of M. Reilly's researches, which are little known over here and which, though his experimental procedures will certainly be criticized by neurophysiologists, may be of value to neurologists and neurosurgeons. Those educated in the traditions of English medicine will be chary of accepting the wider implications that the authors draw, even though they may, in fact, be describing a fundamental mechanism in the pathogenesis of disease.

The style of the book is turgid and the method of presentation, despite irritating repetition of information, the sections on anatomy and physiology are by no means exhaustive. Thus, scant attention is paid to autonomic pathways or functions above diencephalic level. This may have been wise restraint a year or two ago, but it will certainly require revisions in the near future.


This is a clear resumen of the anatomy of the autonomic nervous system, including work of modern authors, it will be of use to students and practitioners alike. It is well illustrated with drawings and clear diagrams. Although authors and a few dates are mentioned, unfortunately the lack of bibliography is a limitation.


This comprehensive book contains four sections. The first is concerned with physiology and includes a study of the movements observed in the human infant soon after birth, and of postural reflexes, the effect of gross cerebral lesions, and the distortions of posture caused by focal epilepsy or electrical stimulation of the brain. The second section analyses the muscular disorders resulting from disease of the muscles, nerves, spinal cord, and brain. The muscular dystonias are considered in special detail. Disorders of the ocular movements in disease are considered in part 3. This publication brings together much of what is known regarding motor functions and their disorders as seen in the clinic. It should be a useful work of reference for the neurologist and neurophysiologist, but unfortunately the quoted references can only rarely be identified, and there is no index to the volume.


This book gives an account of work published by the author in the French press and of the ideas inspiring the school of the late Clovis Vincent. The following points are of interest: in the section dealing with cerebral pathology, the description of the "corneopterygoïd reflex" (contralateral deviation of the mandible on coarse stimulation of the cornea) observed in severe lesions of the upper brain stem, such as occur with a temporal pressure cone; the use of lipiodol (1/3 c.c.m.) in ventriculography for precise localization of obstructions of the aqueduct of Sylvius; observations on the most convenient sites for burr holes in intracranial haemorrhage; and the distinction between "passive" and "active" cerebral oedema. In the third section, on treatment, the author's suggestions of dealing surgically with the temporal pressure cone by his own sub-temporal approach, the anatomy of the venous drainage in the middle fossa, mesencephalic tracotomy, and intervention on the interpeduncular cistern (with reference to streptomycin therapy) deserve the neurosurgical reader's attention.

BOOKS RECEIVED

(Review in a later issue is not precluded by notice here of books recently received)


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