BOOK REVIEWS


This book is an extensive monograph on a small but clinically important subject. Cough syncope—the term was coined in this country by Sharpey-Schaefzer—refers to the sudden brief attacks of loss or clouding of consciousness, rarely accompanied by a slight convulsion, which may follow a bout of coughing. Laryngeal vertigo and laryngeal epilepsy are alternative and better known names, though the neutral and descriptive term cough syncope is far more satisfactory. The authors review 35 cases of their own, giving brief case histories. They also survey the literature extensively. They confirm once more the consistency of the general clinical setting of these attacks—in the thick-set, middle-aged male who has some mild chronic bronchial or laryngeal affection. They review the physiological mechanisms likely to cause syncope and correlate these with the clinical picture of this syndrome. In general, they favour an aetiology based on cerebral circulatory changes consequent on alteration of intrathoracic pressure, but admit that this may not cover all cases. The 355 references will certainly make the work of value to neurologists and physicians interested in the condition. By some oversight, Sharpey-Schaefzer’s useful contribution to the mechanics of cough syncope is omitted from the list, though it is referred to in detail in the text.


Many inconvenient motor disorders depend on the habit-forming tendencies of the nervous system taking control in a way that seriously disturbs function. Whatever psychological factors there may be which start this process, the abnormal mechanism becomes physiologically established and largely resistant to psychological treatment. Thus psychological treatment in itself is disappointing in conditions such as stammering, writer’s cramp, and spasmodic torticollis.

The writer of these small books on stammering has come to a somewhat similar conclusion on the basis of clinical experience and strongly urges the view that treatment should be by “habit-replacement” in which a different technique for speech is evolved for the patient which will gradually replace his own faulty efforts. This approach is not only successful in practice, but seems to be physiologically sound.


This book provides a detailed account of the anatomy, physiology, and clinical methods of investigating disorders of the cranial and spinal nerves. There are over 200 illustrations, most of which are excellent, and they include drawings of the clinical methods of testing the function of individual muscles. The surgical approach to the nerves for division or injection is also considered.


The sixth edition of this publication is an entirely new work and gives a good account of many of the recent advances in knowledge. The subjects covered include the temporal lobes, consciousness, poliomyelitis, demyelinating diseases, the effects of cervical spondylitis, electrencephalography and neuroradiology. Neurologists will find this a useful addition to their library.


If this collection of papers is a fair indication of the present state of psychosomatic medicine, the subject is in a bad way. The faults which have hampered the progress of clinical research are conspicuous in many of the chapters, and the pages expressing therapeutic optimism, conjectures about pathogenesis, and convictions about psychopathology are very numerous in comparison with those recording evidence systematically assembled and strictly analysed. There is, as usual in such collections, a wide diversity of standard between the contributions, ranging from reminiscent and discursive essays to business-like reports of work already published. The first three chapters discuss general issues; the ensuing four are concerned with paediatric studies; ulcerative colitis, essential hypertension, thyrotoxicosis, and bronchial asthma are each dealt with in a separate chapter, as are ophthalmic, obstetrical, and dermatological problems; and in the remaining chapters constitutional aspects, sexual adjustment, muscle tension, music and migraine, group psychotherapy, analytic therapy, and abreaction therapy are considered. The book is not likely, on the whole, to increase respect for this important field of investigation and clinical practice.
BOOK REVIEWS


This little book gives a sketchy orthopaedic account of various spinal diseases. There is no serious attempt to discuss the many interesting problems regarding the various mechanisms by which backache can develop.


This book is a compilation of "most of the important material on psychiatry in World War II". It consists almost entirely of over a thousand abstracts of papers and some book reviews: there is little attempt made to criticize or evaluate the material or to draw conclusions from it. The lack of a subject index further detracts from the book's value.


The author discusses the physiological mechanisms involved in handwriting, and concludes that although this activity reflects certain tendencies of the whole personality, the chief characteristics of a person's writing are determined by the way in which he holds the pen. He refutes the claim that psychological traits can be recognized in individual scripts on the grounds that there is much inconsistency among interpreters and a lack of statistics in their data.

Acta Neuropsiquiatrica argentina

We are glad to welcome the first issue of a new journal concerned with neurology and psychiatry. The first number (Vol. I, No. 1) contains 150 pages and is well produced by Dominguez, Bignone y CIA., Buenos Aires.

BOOKS RECEIVED

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


