BOOK REVIEWS


In the words of the authors, this book attempts to answer two questions: (1) What are the fundamental reactions of muscle to disease? (2) With what clinical entities are these reactions associated?

In answering the first of these questions, they are concerned less with breaking new ground than with clearing away old ambiguities arising from the use of terms such as “degeneration” and “inflammation.” In the result, they have listed the changes which they themselves have observed in 121 muscle biopsies under a number of descriptive terms, avoiding, as far as possible, unwarranted implications as to the nature of the pathological process involved. In order to avoid bias, they took their material “blind” in the first place, and only attempted the clinical correlation after reaching common agreement on their findings.

Two-thirds of the book consists of a lavishly illustrated description of various pathological changes in muscle. The remaining third is mainly devoted to analytical tables showing the relative frequency of these changes in a number of fairly well-defined clinical conditions, which the authors group under four headings, namely, “distal muscular syndromes”, “myotonic syndromes”, “proximal muscular syndromes”, and “myasthenia gravis”.

What this amounts to is a careful and well-presented piece of research, based on a small number of histological techniques and on limited material. The authors have relied almost entirely on two stains—haematoxylin and eosin and Masson trichrome—and have not made use of specific stains for nervous elements. This abstemiousness rather detracts from the interest of the chapter on “Changes in Muscle Spindles and Peripheral Muscular Nerves”.

The standard of photography and reproduction, in black and white and in colour, is very high, and clearly correlated with the price of the book. It is not always clear why colour reproduction has been used, and one is often left unsure whether the striking differences in staining reactions of muscle fibres in different trichrome preparations are due to changes in the tissues or to vagaries of technique.

The use of the word “atlas” in the title is a little misleading. This book is not, and does not set out to be, a comprehensive illustrated work of reference.


Volume XIII of this handbook constitutes the most authoritative and comprehensive work at present available in the field of neuropathology. Against its truly formidable price must be set the fact that there is nothing like it.

Of the two parts under review, the first is concerned with the general aspects of nervous disease, and with the special features of the group of diseases which are commonly regarded as degenerative. The second deals with vascular and circulatory disturbances. Contributors include Scholtz, of Munich (general histopathology and certain aspects of neurovascular disease); Noetzel, of Friburg-im-Breisgau (myoclonus epilepsy, Jacob-Creutzfeld disease, Christensen-Krabbe disease); Hallervorden, of Giessen (diffuse sclerosis, Huntington’s and other forms of chorea, Parkinsonism); Ule, of Kiel (cerebellar atrophy, Friedreich’s ataxia); Jacob of Hamburg (cell degeneration, stranulation); Eicke, of Marburg (Wilson’s disease, cerebral endangiitis obliterans); Friedrich, of Berlin (spinal paralyses, Wernding-Hoffmann disease, amyotonia congenita); Meesen and Stochdorph, of Düsseldorf (embolism, thrombosis, arteriosclerosis); Haymaker, of Washington, D.C. (decompression sickness and atmospheric hypoxidois); and others.

The standard of illustration is very high, and each section is capped with an exhaustive bibliography.


The editors of the British Medical Bulletin have once again produced a volume of exceptional worth, and all who are interested in the nervous system should study this issue. There are authoritative sections from nearly 20 contributors under the general direction of Professor J. H. Burn. Sir Henry Dale writes a striking introduction, in which he concludes:

“...And now this number of British Medical Bulletin, reviewing what is known today about the autonomic nervous system and its functions, and following freely the leads offered by implication and analogy, gives the reader an exhilarating sense of the imminence of further developments, needing only special skill, allied with scientific vision and bold enterprise, to open new and ever widening vistas of knowledge, concerning junctional transmission in the nervous system as a whole.”

In this book Dr. Keele traces briefly the history of ideas on pain mechanisms. Amongst primitive cultures and indeed in some highly organized civilizations such as those of India, China, and early Greece, the heart had pride of place as the organ of sensation, including pain. The Aristotelian view on pain which placed the blood vessels and heart as the essential structures had unfortunately a long life—lengthened by the coming of the Dark Ages and it must be admitted by a certain scientific obscurantism amongst the Fathers of the Church. The rival view that the brain was the essential organ, expressed by Galen though probably derived from the information afforded by the burial customs of Egypt, came once more to prominence after the Renaissance. Soon afterwards the story becomes one of experimental observation and deduction. Although the search for a "sensuum commune", which would embrace pain as well as other sensations, influenced thought and observation right up to the nineteenth century, it is interesting to see how individuals now and then broke away from current conceptions and made both deductions and inspired guesses that were later confirmed as part of our modern physiology of sensation. The main points of this, and some still lively controversies, are mentioned briefly in the last two chapters.

Dr. Keele's book is a thoughtful and scholarly introduction to that background of ideas which has inevitably influenced our views on pain today. As the author himself points out, the past history of the development of scientific views can be as useful in understanding the present position as the past history of the patient in appreciating the significance of his present symptoms.

C. W. M. Whitty.


This is a monograph in the German neurological tradition, thorough and comprehensive—and perhaps a trifle heavy-handed.

Dr. Leischner presents a most competent review and appraisal of alexia and agraphia, illustrated by reports of 36 personally observed cases. Although in none of these cases did a disorder of reading or writing present in completely isolated form, in the majority it was the most outstanding feature in the clinical picture. The relation of these disorders both to one another and to other aspects of language disturbance is considered in some detail and an adequate account given of the various lines of theoretical interpretation.

The author considers that it is appropriate to distinguish between "primary" and "secondary" brain functions. The former are said to be linked with original, unlearnt bodily activities and to possess determinate cerebral localization. The second are concerned with functions acquired by experience and are said to show much greater variability in organization and in cerebral localization. Reading and writing clearly fall into the second category. In consequence, they are held to show only a relative degree of cerebral localization. Dr. Leischner claims that his clinical findings are in broad agreement with such a view.

As with many contemporary German monographs, the contribution of workers other than continental is somewhat under-represented. Thus no mention is made of Holmes's celebrated case of "pure word-blindness", published as long ago as 1950, and little attention is given to American work other than that of Orton and Nielsen. It may be hoped that this somewhat parochial aspect of contemporary German neurology is but a passing phase.

Dr. Leischner's work is careful and solid. His monograph will be of value to all concerned with the analysis of patterns of psychological breakdown due to cerebral lesion.


This book comprises a scholarly account of the history and present-day conceptions of the subject. The author treats with easy confidence the outlook of the philosopher, the physicist, the psychoanalyst, the comparative anatomist, and the neurophysiologist. By using the word "consciousness" the title becomes misleading, as other aspects of so-called mental activity are also considered at length. This book will be read with interest and profit by those who take an interest in how the brain works.


These two books represent, in striking juxtaposition, widely different approaches to the study of instinct. The first comprises the papers and discussions of a symposium organized in 1954 by the Fondation Singer-Polignac, and the emphasis is upon experimental and other empirical data. In the second, the substance is theoretical and the facts are those adduced by the authors whose views Dr. Fletcher discusses.

The first work is massive and many of the contributions represent sustained and detailed studies of "instinctive" and "appetitive" patterns in particular genera. Much of this material will be fresh to the general reader, but anyone who has time to absorb it will find numerous points of interest and be spurred to reframe any general view of the mechanisms underlying these
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