Book reviews

The specialized functions of the nervous system, with the consequent heterogeneity of its structure and the variations of its cell types, both neuronal and glial, impose very obvious limits to the application of many of the methods of classical biochemistry, despite the great advances that have taken place and still are taking place as a result of their use in the study of both the normal and the diseased nervous system. By its very nature indeed the nervous system invites the application of the finer methods of modern histiochemistry and cytochemistry, and the present volume provides an admirable survey of the progress that is being made in this field. The editor has wisely planned this book not as a recipe book of technical methods, but rather to assess the significance and validity of histochemical methods as applied to problems of neurobiology. The book is divided into three parts, the first dealing with techniques, the second with the histochemistry of the normal nervous system, and the third with histochemistry as applied to a wide range of neuropathological problems. As one would hope in a book of this type, the myelin sheath and the many fascinating problems concerned with the processes of Wallerian degeneration and the changes occurring both in experimental allergic encephalomyelitis and in the naturally occurring demyelinating diseases are dealt with broadly and fully. There are also excellent and highly informative chapters on the cerebral storage diseases, cerebrovascular disease, anoxic brain injury, the effects of ischaemia, the retina and its diseases, and the neuromuscular junction and muscle.

The book contains a surprising amount of detailed information over a very wide front. It is well written and well edited, and the plates, figures, and diagrams are plentiful and well reproduced. It is, in short, a highly readable monograph which any investigator of the nervous system, or of its diseases, will find of real value and interest.

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The proceedings of many symposia are increasingly prone to appear very many months after the participants have met and are records of work which has already become known by other means. This criticism certainly cannot be levelled against this symposium on regional cerebral blood flow which has appeared with commendable swiftness and records work in progress. Inevitably this means that much is incomplete and conclusions only tentative but this is no blemish; workers in this field are enabled to know what is currently in progress and to assess the potentialities of work with radioactive inert gases and thermal probes.
The clinician will be particularly interested in the demonstration that focal cerebrovascular lesions produce a fall in total cerebral blood flow as well as a local fall at the site of the lesion, which may be demonstrable when other investigations have proved negative. They will also be interested in the demonstration that after carotid ligation in young people for aneurysm there is a marked fall in carotid blood flow even though the vascularity as demonstrated by angiography seems adequate. The operation, though life-saving, cannot be regarded as ideal.
The symposium is therefore greatly to be welcomed and will be of value to research workers and clinicians alike.

The ever increasing number of papers published each year makes the task of the editors of the Year Book tremendously difficult, if not impossible. Based, as the Year Book is, on summaries of articles, space does not permit more than a very limited number to be summarized which makes it hard to provide an adequate picture of progress in each field. The editors have tried to overcome this by adding references to other papers and comments in small print, but one wonders if a short review of a subject followed by summaries of the more important contributions might not be more satisfactory.

At a time when surgery for ruptured intervertebral disc is less popular in this country than was the case some 10 years ago, it is interesting to meet this book which is based on over 6,000 cases operated from one neurosurgical clinic, at Memphis, Tennessee. The author favours a strictly unilateral approach under local analgesia with minimal bone removal. Although the text and illustrations are clear and to the point, it is perhaps disappointing to find that with such a wealth of material available the book is limited to the clinical diagnosis and the surgical treatment advised. The younger neurosurgeon to whom the book is largely directed would surely have benefited, for example, from a further consideration of the differential diagnosis and