Book reviews


In this well-produced monograph Professor Zapletal gives an interesting account of his experiences in the surgical treatment of intractable pain during the past 20 years. He describes the current theories on transmission of pain impulses and the consequences of intractable pain on the patient. This is a fairly uncritical review and includes, without comment, certain theories which are now out of fashion, but the account of the anatomy and physiology of pain pathways will be of interest to anyone involved in this type of work and there is a comprehensive bibliography. For certain practical reasons stereotaxic surgery has not been developed in this clinic and as an alternative an open infra-tentorial approach to the mesencephalon and posterior thalamus has been developed. The writer has used this technique in the treatment of extra-pyramidal disease and intractable pain but only the latter subject is dealt with in this monograph. Recent work on percutaneous cordotomy, which would almost certainly modify the writer's views on the treatment of intractable pain, is not mentioned. He reverts the results of 24 open mesencephalic operations on 18 patients between 1955 and 1957. Fourteen patients between 1958 and 1960 were operated on by open mesencephalothalamotomy by destruction of the spino-thalamic tract at the junction of the mesencephalon and the thalamus. Subsequently, a total of 30 open thalamotomies for intractable pain on 22 patients were performed. The results described are similar to other series and certainly compare well with stereotaxic surgery. The immediate results of operation are gratifying, with an increasing incidence of recurrence with the passage of time, depending on the length of survival. A high proportion of these patients were in the terminal stages of malignancy. Professor Zapletal's view that the open operation, under direct vision, is more accurate than stereotaxic surgery is not altogether convincing and is reminiscent of the declaration that 'surgery is more of an art than a science.' However, this description of his experiences is well worth study and is recommended to all those interested in the subject.

J. A. SIMPSON


This book of 80 pages is very well printed with a considerable number of Tables and illustrations. The main problem is to understand why and for whom this book was written. The author presumes that the term paroxysmal dysrhythmia is a universally accepted entity. However, in his illustration of EEG features it is difficult to understand what should be included and what should be excluded of all the varieties of possible EEG changes. In the first four illustrations of EEGs there is no indication as to whether electrode placement or montages. The Tables are very clear but it is difficult to understand their relationship to the main aim of the book.

The German terminology is difficult to understand as
OPEN MESENCEPHALOTOMY AND THALAMOTOMY FOR INTRACTABLE PAIN

John Hankinson

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