patient, the presence of concomitant medical disease, season of the year, duration of hospitalization, seniority of the surgeon, and the type of suture material were not found to be significant factors. The author is less certain about the use of antibacterial agents, especially topical bacitricin, in preventing infection.

Most of the infections occurred in patients undergoing lumbar disc protrusion surgery. Surprisingly the author recommends excision and packing, and healing by secondary intention as the optimum method of treatment in these cases.

No details are given regarding the ventilation of their operating theatres, but reference is made to the use in other hospitals of 'laminar' ventilation (better named 'unidirectional flow ventilation'), which has superseded ordinary plenum systems. There is no mention of the order of the infected operation case in the operating list, or the day of the week, or the apparent source of the infection. Nor are we told if the infections appeared sporadically or as an 'epidemic'. There is scanty reference to bacteriological aspects and this is a notable fault of this otherwise valuable study, which includes a useful survey of the literature on the subject of post-operative wound infections in general, and in neurosurgery in particular.

P. HARRIS


Book reviews

and to a much wider readership of individual medical and biological scientists, including senior undergraduate students.

J. S. GILLESPIE


We have recently reviewed a number of books on paediatric neurology, reflecting the growth in status of this specialty in other countries and which will surely follow in Great Britain. Dr. Gamstorp is well known for her work on disorders of muscle. She is one of the distinguished few to have a disease named after her. It is, therefore, natural that the chapters on peripheral nerve and muscle are superb. The book is clinically orientated, being arranged according to the dominant symptom, such as convulsions, mental retardation, ataxia, involuntary movements, headache, etc., or in categories such as abnormal growth of the head, malformations, etc. There is a wide coverage but a book of this size cannot devote space to detailed description or review of controversial material. Indeed, the dogmatic approach, so satisfactory for the beginner, may be less acceptable to the experienced neurologist with a difficult paediatric problem. For instance, the presentation of the neurological complications of infections and immunizations is too brief. The most worrying problem for the neurologist with limited paediatric experience is the progressive neurological and mental deterioration, including necrotizing encephalopathy, but the descriptions are too short to be helpful.

On the other hand, the examination of the newborn and older children and the use of ancillary methods of investigation are excellent.

The production is very good, well printed and with unusually good illustrations, some in colour. The book is assured of a welcome.

J. A. SIMPSON


‘Today, there exists an extraordinary confusion with respect to the diagnostic implications of the term amaurotic familial idiocy and its subtypes, classified either eponymically or by the age of onset.’ Thus Wolfang Zeman introduces his chapter in Volume 10 of the Handbook of Clinical Neurology. This observation might justifiably be extended to all the conditions described in this volume devoted to the leucodystrophies and poliodystrophies. Even the original title ‘leucodystrophies and lipidoses’ was considered to be inexact and was consequently changed during its preparation.

Most neurologists have a passing familiarity with these diseases and perhaps feel in view of their rarity and the absence of active treatment that this is all that is required or is justifiable. Furthermore, individual experience shows that standard classifications are either imprecise or too exclusive. One result has been a deplorable tendency to make qualified or hybrid diagnoses, adding to the difficulties of understanding and bringing the classifications into further disrespect.