Book reviews


The Congress of Neurosurgeons began in 1951 on the initiative of a group of younger neurosurgeons. In the last 20 years its membership has grown from 69 to over 1,000, but it has retained its original intentions and virility by a constitution which ensured that the office bearers and organizers were always young men. Residents in training are encouraged to join, financial concessions make it possible for them to attend meetings, and these are organized as an educational exercise, by inviting established authorities to give lectures on selected topics, chosen to provide a balanced programme. As a result Clinical Neurosurgery is a valuable volume which all neurosurgeons look forward to each year; it is in quite a different class from the usual conference tome, full of brief and unconnected papers of widely varying quality. As the title suggests Clinical Neurosurgery includes excellent clinical reviews but the two recent volumes include also a section of seminars on fundamental research—in volume 18 on coma and sleep, in volume 19 on basic mechanisms of memory. It is also the custom to invite a senior neurosurgical citizen as guest of honour and his two or three papers afford an opportunity for historical and philosophical reflections as well as an experienced perspective on clinical and experimental work. Add to this the refreshing presidential address, from one of the (angry?) young men of neurosurgery and it will be clear that these volumes really do include something of interest for every neurosurgeon, whatever his own interests or prejudices. It is a relief to be able so warmly to recommend these books, when the question posed by so many other books is whether anyone would really want to read them. The most recent volume has a more consistent theme than former ones, and that is 'head injury'. It includes papers on mechanisms as revealed by animal experiment and by a pathologist who visited the scene of the accident before examining the brains of head injury fatalities. There are chapters on engineering and socio-psychological aspects of accident prevention, as well as down to earth clinical accounts of metabolic disorders, testing for acoustic vestibular damage, and aspects of prognosis. This is a significant contribution to the literature on head injury.

BRYAN JENNETT


The problems presented to society by steadily increasing numbers of old people are probably more closely connected with their emotional difficulties and failing intellect than with their decreasing physical powers. The medical profession is devoting increasing amounts of time to this field of interest, but the need for informed clinical and psychological assessments of the elderly has never been greater. Moreover, much more attention is required to the basic physical changes occurring in the ageing brain. In their book the authors of Clinical Aspects of Dementia highlight these needs. Their approach, though primarily clinical, includes observations upon pathological aspects of dementia, and upon psychological evaluation of the old person. The book is ideal for undergraduates and postgraduates in psychiatry, but in parts, may fall short of the needs of those in clinical neurology or neurosurgery. Although short, it contains a full bibliography for the reader who wishes to delve further into this fascinating subject.

MICHAEL R. BOND


I found this book fascinating and irritating. The analysis of higher mental functions into component parts was convincing. Similarly the synthesis of the individual elements into complex executive action seemed reasonable. These descriptions provide a base for imaginative investigation of the patient and propose models which are an aid to the understanding of cerebral function in health and disease. However, the transfer of theory to the structure of the brain is less satisfying.

One of the apparent aims of this essay is to correlate the separate elements of mental function with precise cortical localization. In the practical terms of patient management, such localization is not only inaccurate but is often irrelevant. Pathological conditions not only affect the cortex but also involve the
subcortical connections influencing areas of cortex remote from the lesion.

In general the translation has been made into idiomatic English. However, the literature of dysphasia is infamous for the complexity of its language and the use of unconventional terms. The Working Brain is no exception.

IVAN T. DRAPER


This small paper-back volume embodies the proceedings of a symposium on muscle diseases held at the spa town of Janske Lazne in Czechoslovakia in March 1971. It includes some 37 contributions from the 60 participants, many of whom came from Eastern Europe, but three (Emery, Hughes, and Walton) attended from Great Britain and there were also invited papers from Western Germany, Italy, France, and Switzerland. While most of the papers are brief synopses of work previously published elsewhere, and some indeed are summaries only, a number of original papers from Czechoslovakian workers are included. Many of these deal specifically with the physical and psychological management of patients with the various forms of neuromuscular disease which are treated in the Children’s Medical Institute at Janske Lazne. All of the papers are printed in English. The book has been printed inexpensively and the reproduction of certain of the microphotographs and electron micrographs has suffered as a result, though on the whole the illustrations are reasonably clear. Essentially the book is a short and highly selective review of some important problems in neuromuscular disease but its brevity and selectivity mean that it will have a limited appeal to readers in the U.S.A. and Western Europe to whom most of the information which it contains is readily available in extenso elsewhere.

J. N. WALTON


This book is essentially a personal document, reflecting the authors’ interests and its accent is upon the individual types of epileptic seizure which have been extensively studied by the ‘Marseille School’.

Initially, there is brief reference to the classification of seizures and the use of electro-clinical investigatory techniques. The main chapter, comprising over a third of the text, consists of a comprehensive review of seizure patterns, their EEG accompaniments, and their pathophysiological basis. They are classified according to their supposed generalized, local, or unilateral origin and there is reference to secondary generalization. Seizures are also considered according to their distribution in time, their mode of precipitation, the combinations in which they may occur and, finally, according to their patterns in relation to age and aetiology. Apropos diagnosis, the authors are at pains to distinguish the condition of recurrent seizures (chronic epilepsy) from attacks considered not to reflect excessive neuronal discharge such as those due to anoxia or metabolic disorders. Finally, treatment is dealt with briefly in all its aspects, including genetic counselling and prognostication. This is undoubtedly a book of great interest, especially to enthusiasts, and contains a wealth of useful information.

MAURICE PARSONAGE

HEAD INJURY FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PENETRATING HEAD WOUNDS By E. S. Gurdjian. (Pp. 139; $11.75.) Thomas: Springfield. 1973.

Dr. Gurdjian’s life-long concern with head injuries should have fitted him well for a scholarly book on the historical aspects of this subject. Unfortunately, in this short book, an expanded version of a lecture, he attempts too much and the result is disappointing. The historical information is more of a catalogue than an account, and such is Dr. Gurdjian’s zeal as a teacher that half the book deals with current research and practice as seen from Detroit. There are 176 references, but many of these too are to recent literature on head injury. Nonetheless, there are many interesting facts and illustrations here which could be useful for someone looking for a historical introduction to an article or lecture on some aspect of head injury.

BRYAN JENNETT


There have been many advances in recent years in the understanding of the ways in which body temperature is controlled, and this readable book gives a valuable survey of the subject. The sensing of body temperature is essential for its control, and the author describes the sensitivity of the hypothalamus to heat and cold, and of the skin and nasal and buccal surfaces. He also argues that at any rate in some species there are temperature sensors which have