Book reviews

STROKES: NATURAL HISTORY, PATHOLOGY AND SURGICAL TREATMENT. (*Major Problems in Neurology*, Vol. 4). By E. C. Hutchinson and E. J. Acheson. (Pp. 283; illustrated; £8.00.) Saunders: London. 1975.

Widespread recognition of the importance of disease in the great vessels of the neck as a cause of cerebrovascular insufficiency, to which Dr Hutchinson and his colleagues made important contributions, and the development of anticoagulant therapy led to an era of active experimental and therapeutic interest in the previously neglected field of strokes and transient cerebral ischaemic attacks. This was followed by a period of disenchantment in which the recognition of special groups of patients suitable for treatment has not been widely appreciated. The importance of controlling hypertension is now well-established, and the previous fear of iatrogenic cerebral insufficiency shown to be unfounded. The time is now ripe for a balanced appreciation of cerebral vascular disease, and this book provides it in an admirably concise way. The summaries at the end of most chapters are very helpful in providing a rapid synopsis. This book adds to the growing prestige of the series.

J. A. SIMPSON

LESSONS OF LEUCOTOMY By Ashley Robin and Duncan Macdonald. (Pp. 100; illustrated; £2.25.) Kimpton: London. 1975.

I have always liked Dr Robin's somewhat abrasive style ever since I heard him speak in the Glasgow University Union some 30 years ago. Therefore, I liked this book for its abrasive quality, its lucidity and for the quotes beneath the chapter headings—for example, Chapter 9: 'In my youth', Father William replied to his son, I feared it might injure the brain, But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none, Why, I do it again and again' (*Alice in Wonderland*). Somehow this made me think of Clouston and his masturbatory insanity.

It is really quite a tragic thought that by 1954, 10,000 leucotomies had been performed in England and Wales, 60% on schizophrenics. Authors Robin and Macdonald review the history of psychosurgery, the anatomy underlying these operations, the results, the complications. Their findings will not please neurosurgeons as there really is little, if any, controlled trial evidence that these operations have produced results different from those associated with

other treatments (or no treatment at all) except in so far as resulting in a greater mortality.

I have recommended leucotomy five times since 1960. Two patients (one very paranoid woman and an extremely obsessional man) did really seem to benefit. Two others (one chronic depression and one obsessional neurosis) got much worse and in each case there was some evidence of more than expected brain damage after operation.

Robin and Macdonald have done us a useful service by assembling this mass of critical evidence. One very careful study with which I was marginally involved was that of Dr Partridge of St George's. He gets mentioned in a table on page 79 but, rather rudely, has been left out of the references. I would have thought his study merited a few lines.

A. D. FORREST

EXERCISES IN NEUROLOGICAL DIAGNOSIS By J. H. Tyrer and J. M. Sutherland. (Pp. 311; illustrated; £4.00.) Churchill Livingstone: Edinburgh. 1975.

This book is directed to the undergraduate student and consists of a series of case histories with results of physical examination and of selected investigations. The student is invited to commit the diagnosis to paper before referring to the discussion of the case. At the end of each chapter, or 'clinic', there is a multiple-choice question paper on cases described.

The case reports and discussions are, in general, admirable and no student could fail to learn from reading them, but the total lack of systematic grouping of symptoms or diseases is disconcerting and scarcely fulfils the promise of the 'programmed learning' in the preface. The symptoms of neurological disease and the complexities of diagnosis are inexhaustibly fascinating, but their description in almost complete isolation from the treatment and management of the patients, as in this book, is perhaps to perpetuate a somewhat old-fashioned approach. The enquiring student who wishes to explore more deeply is referred to the formidable, and incomplete, *Handbook of Neurology*.

The aim of transposing bedside teaching to the printed page must be applauded, and this book is clearly written and well produced, but possibly a less random approach to common or classical neurological diseases might prove more helpful to the student.

W. B. MATTHEWS