Books

Year Book of Neurology and Neurosurgery. Edited by Russell N De Jong and Oscar Sugar. (Pp 410; £24.75.) London: Year Book Medical Publishers Ltd, 1981.

There are something like 138 journals of neurology published world-wide. On a conservative estimate this amounts to some 20 000 neurological papers published each year. Although some of these journals can be nobody's everyday reading, the accumulated papers are formidable. All the more reason one should welcome a publication such as the "Year Book", particularly since the publishers state that the distinguished editors of the Year Book series (twenty-five Year Books) critically review more than 500 000 articles each year. With two editors for the Year Book of Neurology and Neurosurgery, each stalwart has critically reviewed 192 articles per week for every week in the year.

This is really a quite extraordinary book. It has been "published without interruption since 1902" as the byline proudly proclaims. It must be familiar to most neurologists and neurosurgeons and is perhaps one of the most uncritically accepted books in the scientific literature. It is a vital piece of equipment for the young neurologist or neurosurgeon intent on one-upmanship. It is essential ammunition for the rapid fire of names and references across the patient's bed and the case-conference floor. If politicians read medicine this would be their book. It is superficial, idiosyncratic and unreliable. There is no attempt to review a subject in depth or critically. In most instances a single paper is summarised and a personal comment added, presumably by the editor. But the superficiality is almost unbelievable: cluster headache (a single paper) described as outlining the "essentials of management . . ." with no mention of suppository or subcutaneous ergotamine; as uncritical comment on a single paper on computerised tomography in herpes simplex encephalitis . . . to add to the list would be easy but pointless.

Surely the only reasonable way to provide a year book of neurology and neurosurgery is in review form such as found in "Recent Advances" and "Modern Trends" or in "excerpts" form with most published papers annotated and the

critique left to the reader. The editors are, however, to be commended on their industry and stamina and scholarship and the publishers on the clear readable lay-out and reasonable price. Whether one agrees with the format or not must be a personal choice. The reviewer favours a more critical and balanced review of published papers on any particular subject, rather than the one-sided or narrow view presented in many of the papers of the Year Book.

LS ILLIS

Neurophysiology IV—Volume 25 of International Review of Physiology. Edited by Robert Porter. (Pp 231; \$34.50.) Baltimore: University Park Press. 1981.

This is a collection of five excellent reviews which will be ideal for teachers and post-graduate students needing informative rather than exhaustive introductions to unfamiliar fields. The volume is devoted mainly to motor control, and the first review by Gage and Hamill on the action of anaesthetics on ion channels is a rather strange biophysical bedfellow to the subsequent articles. The kinetics of ion channels are discussed clearly for both local and general anaesthetics, and molecular models reviewed briefly. Like the others this is not a chapter for beginners in the field; an undergraduate knowledge of physiology is assumed throughout. The next two chapters concern muscle spindles. Prochazka reviews the very delicate work which has allowed observation of muscle spindle discharge during normal movements in unrestrained cats, and Burke describes the equally painstaking research which has allowed percutaneous recording of spindles in man. Each is a fine exposition of a complex field, leading, perhaps unfortunately to rather different conclusions regarding the role of alpha-gamma linkage, and the function of spindle discharge in control of movement. It is at points like this that the reader might require a little more editorial assistance to highlight the current areas of controversy in each field.

These chapters are followed by Proske's article on Golgi tendon organs, which includes not only an informative discussion of their possible role, but also a short section on their central projections. A

welcome review by Jones on the organisation of the mammalian thalamus, a topic generally considered too complex for review at this level, concludes the book. Perhaps because of the range of articles, this will be an essential acquisition for any library rather than an addition to a personal collection.

JOHN ROTHWELL

Monographs in Neural Sciences Vol. 7. Neurobiology of Cholinergic and Adrenergic Transmitters. Edited by E Heldman, A Levy, Y Gutman and Z Vogel. (Pp 200; SFr 89, DM 107, US \$53.50.) Basel: S Karger, 1980.

This is a very marginal book even by the distressing standards that the publishers of conference ephemera adopt. The book's title suggests that one might look for a reasonably comprehensive coverage of problems, and recent progress towards their solution, in the cholinergic and adrenergic system. One would be disappointed; in the articles offered I could find little that had not been published elsewhere and large areas of current interest are left unmentioned; these include current views on cholinergic pathways, choline transport, nicotinic ACh receptors, noradrenergic pathways, and adrenergic receptors. However serotonin has been redefined as an adrenergic transmitter and an article, doubtless worthy, included on serotonin receptors. This last exactly illustrates the expediency with which the editors and publisher have approached their task.

Everybody recognises the problem; the conference organisers need the publisher's advance to pay the contributors' travel expenses. Publishers are happy to co-operate, confident that their profit margins are so large that assured sales to libraries will cover their costs and still provide rich pickings. However, the financial climate is increasingly compelling libraries to be more selective. This book should come low on their list of priorities.

RM MARCHBANKS

Disorders of Human Communication, Volume 2: Clinical Aspects of Dysphasia. By Martin L Albert, Harold Goodglass, Nancy A Helm, Alan B Rubens, Michael