CMT disease, mainly on lipids, were largely negative as, expectedly, were the therapeutic studies with dietary fatty acid and vitamin E supplementation, gangliosides and TRH. There is a helpful contribution on the value of physiotherapy and orthotic appliances in conservative management and also a report on surgical management in a group of patients, but neither breaks new ground.

To judge from the publications, which are of somewhat variable quality and interest, the meeting should have been useful for the participants at the time. Whether the publication of these papers three years later will be useful to readers at this stage (those who can afford to part with \$120) is less certain.

PK THOMAS

Magnetic Stimulation in Clinical Neurophysiology. Edited by S. CHOKROVERTY. (Pp 308; Price £48.00) Boston and Guildford: Butterworth Scientific Ltd, 1990. ISBN 0-409-90151-2.

Evaluation of the central motor pathways in intact man became possible only recently, following the introduction in 1980 by Merton and Morton of a new electrical stimulator which could excite the brain directly through the scalp. This approach opened a new and exciting line of investigation, but its clinical usefulness was limited by the local scalp discomfort of the electrical stimulus.

Coincidentally, a group from the University of Sheffield developed a magnetic stimulator which was capable of delivering a pulsed magnetic field of sufficient strength to excite the brain and produce contractions of upper limb muscles without any accompanying scalp pain. Since its introduction in 1985, numerous laboratories have developed and applied the technique in a variety of experimental and clinical settings. This volume is based on the First International Symposium on Magnetic Stimulation in Clinical Neurophysiology, held in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1987, and represents the first attempt to describe the experimental and diagnostic applications.

There are 19 chapters and, as might be expected from the origins of volume in a symposium, a grand total of 49 contributing authors. The major topics covered include the history and basic principles of magnetic stimulation, the design of electromagnetic stimulators, mechanisms of electrical and magnetic coil excitation of the central and peripheral nervous systems, bio-safety aspects and the clinical applications of the technique.

Like many multi-author texts it suffers from variations in style and repetition. This is particularly apparent in the historical and technical section where the same illustration occurs in consecutive chapters. A stronger editorial hand would not have gone amiss here. Nevertheless, a reasonable balance has been achieved in the technical chapters with sufficient detail for the engineers and a relatively clear elucidation of the basic underlying electromagnetic concepts for the non-technically minded.

The section covering the basic mechanisms of magnetic and electrical stimulation of cortex and peripheral nerve contains a good deal of practical as well as theoretical information. The chapters by Amassian and co-

authors, and Thompson and co-authors are particularly worthy of mention and while the former perhaps embraces too many different topics, it does emphasise the wide range of potential applications of the technique in the investigation of the motor and other cortical systems.

There are clear accounts of the method for assessing central motor conduction which is one of the clinically important variables. The reader is properly alerted to slight methodological differences in its measurement among different laboratories, according to whether the muscles from which the recordings are obtained are relaxed or contracted. The clinical usefulness of central motor conduction has yet to be thoroughly evaluated, but the experience gained with the technique by the Sheffield and National Hospital groups in multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, cervical spondylosis and degenerative ataxic disorders is presented in a clear and comprehensive manner. It is apparent from the evidence presented that abnormalities of central motor conduction are non-specific and of limited diagnostic value in the individual case.

In contrast the chapters describing the use of the technique for spinal cord monitoring during spinal cord surgery and assessment of central motor function in stroke are disappointing, based as they are on the enthusiasm of the authors for the potential application of the technique in these areas, rather than on hard data.

The final section covers magnetic stimulus of the peripheral nervous system. Apart from a few instances, for example intracranial stimulation of the facial nerve and stimulation of roots or nerves such as the sciatic, which are relatively inaccessible to percutaneous electrical excitation, it would appear that magnetic stimulation of individual nerves with the currently available coils cannot compete with traditional electrical stimulation.

With further technical advances, for example in coil design, it is possible that the claim in the foreword "magnetic stimulation promises to profoundly alter the field of clinical neurophysiology" will be fulfilled. Certainly it will make a large and significant contribution to our understanding of the physiology and pathophysiology of the central nervous system. This volume provides an excellent summary of the current knowledge of the technique and can be recommended to all those involved in basic and clinical neuroscience.

PETER FAWCETT

MRI of the Spine A Guide to Clinical Applications. By MARC C. KAISER AND LINO RAMOS. (Pp 162 illustrated; Price DM168.00) Stuttgart, Thieme, 1990. ISBN 3-13-738101-0.

Magnetic resonance text books can be rather intimidating, but there is nothing daunting about this concise book. Being only 160 pages long and copiously illustrated, it can be digested quickly. The authors practice in Holland and Luxembourg, but have written in English, and in general the book reads very well.

Initial chapters concern the technical aspects of spinal MR and normal anatomy, and are brief and simple. Individual chapters are then devoted to the major areas of path-

ology, and suggestions are made as to the most appropriate radiological approach, and of how MR should be integrated with established techniques. Specific diseases are then discussed, with a short synopsis of the clinical features.

The book relies on good case studies to illustrate important points, accompanied by satisfactory images which have been well reproduced. The images are not all of optimal quality, but that is hard to achieve in such a rapidly changing specialty. I would like to have seen more technical data about the scans, such as slice thickness and number of excitations. In the figure headings, individual images are identified at the end of the sentence which explains them. I found this most irritating. The chapters are well referenced.

The authors' intention is to help diagnostic radiologists and clinicians to choose the optimal imaging technique in patients with spinal disease, and to perform them in a logical sequence. I think they have achieved that aim. This book will offer relatively little to the neuro-radiologist who is experienced in MR, but for lesser mortals it will be invaluable.

RICHARD J V BARTLETT

SHORT NOTICES

Theoretical Perspectives on Language Deficits. By YOSEF GRODZINSKY. (Pp 192; Price £22.50) London: The MIT Press, 1990. ISBN 0262-071123-1.

A Moment of Transition: Two Neuroscientific Articles. By SIGMUND FREUD. Translated and Edited by M SOLMS AND M SALING (Pp 164; Price £15.00) London: Karnac (Books) Ltd, 1990. ISBN 0-946439-92-3.

Neurochirurgie Vol. 36 1990 Masson, Paris. 40th Annual Congress L'hydrocephalie chronique de l'adulte. An extensive summary of 243 cases with Summary in English.

Current Trends in Epilepsy: A Self-Study Course for Physicians. Units I, II and III. Edited by W A Hauser (Pp Combined Course 181; Price: Set \$20.00).

For copies and information contact—Director, Research & Professional Education, Epilepsy Foundation of America, 4351 Garden City Drive, Landover, MD 20785 (301) 459-3700 or EFA's National Epilepsy Library 1-800-EFA-4050, 1990.

Festina Lente—A Psychiatric Odyssey. By HENRY R ROLLIN. (Pp 194; Price: UK £14.95; Abroad £17.50 including postage by air abroad. BMA Members: UK £13.95; Abroad £16.50. 1990. The Memoir Club, BMJ. ISBN 0-7279-0285-7.