Book reviews


This latest addition to the series on contemporary neurology is a classic of its kind and can already be recognized as the definitive work on the Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome. It is an example of what can still be learned by the traditional methods of clinicopathological correlation. The authors, who are distinguished both as clinicians and pathologists, have studied over 20 years 250 cases of this rare but important syndrome and not only bring together previous work but add much original material on pathology and on prognosis. A number of older observations are subjected to careful analysis and found to be correct. It is confirmed that the disease occurs almost exclusively in alcoholics with dietary deficiency and can be recognized confidently on a clinical basis by a combination of ocular palsy, nystagmus, ataxia, and mental change. The ocular palsies respond well to thiamine, while mental change and polyneuropathy (present in 80% of cases) respond poorly. The early mental changes are found to consist of confusion and delirium rather than the classical Korsakoff psychosis and in severe cases a chronic non-confabulatory amnesia is found to persist indefinitely.

On the pathological side the essential lesions are found to be vacuolization and destruction of cerebral parenchyma with destruction of myelinated fibres rather than of neurones. Gliotic and vascular changes are of secondary importance. The curious distribution of the lesion in the paraventricular area of the diencephalon and brain-stem are found to be unrelated to cell type, blood supply, or embryonic origin. The authors consider that the changes are consistent with a metabolic disorder secondary to enzyme deficiency. The ocular and vestibular features, which are particularly well described both clinically and pathologically, are found to correspond to a lesion of the 3rd and 6th nerve nuclei, the adjacent tegmentum, and the vestibular nuclei. No significant cell loss is found in these areas, thus explaining the rapid recovery. The lesions in the mammillary bodies are found to correlate poorly with amnesia, which is related more closely to changes in the medial dorsal nuclei of the diencephalon.

The presentation is clear and simple, the illustrations of high quality. Altogether this is a remarkable work of medical scholarship; for the reader it is a source of stimulus and information, and for the authors a source of lasting renown.

R. W. ROSS RUSSELL


Among the avalanche of clinical research which descends relentlessly upon us, it is only very occasionally that we encounter an endeavour which is clearly destined to be a landmark. Such is the 'Isle of Wight project' of which the present volume is a companion to Education, Health and Behaviour, edited by Tizard and Whitmore, and published in 1970. Rutter and his colleagues are to be congratulated on this elegant epidemiological contribution to clinical child psychiatry and neurology. Four main questions are posed: (1) Is the rate of psychiatric disorder increased in children with organic brain dysfunction? (2) If it is increased, is the high rate of psychiatric disorder due to the presence of physical handicap, or to the presence of a disorder specifically of the brain? (3) Is there a specific type of psychiatric disorder which is associated with organic brain dysfunction? (4) As not all children with disorders of the brain have psychiatric abnormality, what features of the child, his brain disorder, or his environment determine the development of emotional or behavioural problems?

The project involved an initial screening of the entire school-age population of the island from which were extracted all children likely to be affected, who were then subjected to intensive investigation by a team of physicians, psychologists, and social scientists.

The report is in four parts. The first is a comprehensive review of the literature. The second describes the procedures and findings of neurological assessment. The third deals with the epidemiology of neuroepileptic disorders of childhood, and the fourth with the psychiatric aspects of these same disorders.

To satisfy the rigours of the study, standardized procedures for neurological examination and psychiatric interview were devised, and tested where possible for validity and reliability. The methodological aspects themselves justify careful study by any researcher embarking on related projects.

The main finding is unequivocal—namely, that psychiatric disorders are commoner in children with organic brain dysfunction. Moreover, this is shown not to be due to related physical handicap. It seems likely that no specific psychiatric disorder results. The fourth question, regarding why precisely such children are psychiatrically disturbed, remains
unanswered, but it seems likely that they are vulnerable to the same stresses as other children, only more so. Inevitably, numerous subsidiary questions are thrown up which suggest further lines of profitable inquiry.

No departmental library of neurology, paediatrics, or child psychiatry should be without this volume, and many individuals will wish to have a personal copy, for it is well produced at reasonable cost.

F. H. STONE


When Sir Ludwig Guttmann took over Stoke Mandeville as a hospital for spinal injuries, many other surgeons showed little interest or were daunted by the task. The saga of Stoke Mandeville now ranks among the brightest medical achievements of the second world war. Sir Ludwig took up his position with immense and infectious enthusiasm, total devotion, and much and ever-increasing knowledge of the specialty, and today his name, linked with that of Stoke Mandeville, points to achievements not often paralleled in the history of medical practice.

He made the lame walk using every muscle bundle that had survived the injury, he avoided and often reversed the dread complications of spinal transaction, and he trained practitioners from all over the world, instilling into them some of his own optimism, grounded on sound theoretical knowledge so that in many parts of the world there is today hope for those with severe spinal injuries where none had existed before.

It is good to have now Sir Ludwig’s experience and advice presented in one lucid chapter of this second and final volume of an entirely praiseworthy undertaking.

One, however, who worked at casualty clearing station level in the last war might take issue with Sir Ludwig over the feasibility of his counsels of perfection in such circumstances, and surgeons in the developing countries might find it equally difficult to have sufficient staff at their disposal to change catheters under sterile conditions and to avoid pressure sores. I think there is still a place for the indwelling catheter released four-hourly, and even for high femoral amputations, as distasteful as this latter measure undoubtedly is. But it can save lives.

Professor Maurer, in his section on peripheral nerve injuries, quite obviously draws on a long and extensive experience. The section is of great value for the beginner but also for the expert in this field.

There are detailed descriptions of all procedures used in the treatment of nerve injuries.

The sections on anatomy and pathophysiology are well executed and the text is liberally supplemented by illustrations. The references to the literature are exhaustive.

J. SCHORSTEIN


When the first edition of this book appeared in 1956 the electrodiagnostic procedures for measuring muscle excitability by electrical stimulation were firmly established and their value had been confirmed by wartime experience in the assessment of peripheral nerve injuries. On the other hand, the first published accounts of the clinical application of electromyography were relatively recent and the development of nerve conduction velocity measurement as a method of clinical investigation was in its early stages. The next five years saw many important advances, both in connection with electromyography and nerve conduction measurement, and a greatly expanded edition of the book appeared in 1961. In the past decade electrodiagnostic methods have become more widely applied in clinical practice and there has been much interest in new techniques of quantitative analysis.

In the present third edition the later sections of electromyography and nerve conduction measurement have been rewritten and the distinguished panel of authors has been joined by several new names who have all made important contributions to the advances of the past decade. Of particular interest in the present edition are the reviews of recent quantitative techniques, the definitive accounts of neuromuscular transmission defects and nerve conduction velocity measurement, and the appendices on recording technique and terminology.

The earlier sections on electrodiagnosis are virtually unchanged and here the beginner may have difficulty in distinguishing what is of clinical value from what is now of historical interest. Later editions might profitably include a somewhat fuller account of the electrophysiological study of reflexes.

It is a pleasure to welcome this reappearance of an important established text. It is essential reading for anyone working in the field.

J. A. R. LENMAN


This short monograph in German is a further contribution to the study of spinal fluid proteins using polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. The work’s main feature and value is a detailed comparison of CSF