Book reviews

THE CLINICAL DELINEATION OF BIRTH DEFECTS—Part VI: Nervous system Edited by Daniel Bergsma. (Pp. 255; illustrated; £8.) Churchill Livingstone: Edinburgh.

This beautifully produced book published by the National Foundation—March of Dimes presents the proceedings of the second conference on the clinical delineation of birth defects which was held at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, in May 1969. The volume is dedicated to Frank R. Ford and it is a fitting tribute to this pioneer of paediatric neurology whose accumulated wisdom and powers of clinical description receive due acknowledgement in the dedication.

Many reports of conferences on specialized aspects of disease are disappointing. In particular when rare neurological syndromes are discussed one finds that the reports resemble a philatelic catalogue to a rather alarming extent. It is probably no accident that so many neurologists specializing in paediatrics are stamp collectors; and that some of them appear to collect rare syndromes and publish articles about them much in the same way as they would describe a rare stamp with unusual perforations or a missing water mark.

This book represents much more than a neuro-paediatric catalogue. The first seven contributions, beginning with the introduction by Dr. Victor McKusick, one of the associate editors, describe the clinical, genetic, morphological, and biochemical approaches to the study of neurological disorders, with particular reference to their classification. All these contributions are well worth reading and together present a wide ranging view of congenital abnormalities of the nervous system. Professor David Clark, for example, in spite of the fact that he admits to becoming greyer, gives a most lucid account of the part that a clinical neurologist can play in recognizing rare neurological disorders which subsequent biochemical investigation may show can be alleviated by drug or dietary treatment. Professor Becker's chapter on 'Genetic approaches to the nosology of nervous system defects' gives a very clearly presented account of how a geneticist looks at neurological disease.

The three chapters on 'Biochemical approaches to the nosology of nervous system defects' by McKusick, Brady, and Menkes are all a little too short and should perhaps have been combined into a very much longer and more comprehensive review of

the vast amount of research which has been undertaken in recent years into the biochemical abnormalities associated with congenital disease of the nervous system.

Some indication of the range of subjects covered in the Johns Hopkins Conference may be given by quoting from some of the chapter headings. These include 'The metabolic basis of the Refsum syndrome' by Steinberg, 'Viral infections and malformations of the nervous system' by Johnson, 'Classification of cerebral malformations' by Meyer, 'Anencephaly and spina bifida: an etiologic hypothesis' by Nance, 'Clinical aspects of globoid cell and metachromatic leukodystrophies' by Hagberg (with 23 references to the condition including six of which he was author), 'The nosology of mental retardation' by Moser and Wolf, 'The nosology of epilepsy' by Schmidt, and 'Hereditary disease of the cerebellar parenchyma' by Weiner and Konigsmark. For good measure there are a number of short contributions describing rare syndromes such as 'An oculocerebrofacial syndrome' and 'Dominant olivopontocerebellar atrophy with dementia and extrapyramidal signs'. There are also a series of interesting short case reports. The book is beautifully illustrated and printed and the 'biographic data' given about each author accompanied by photographs do add a certain personal interest. This book should be available for reference in any paediatric or neurological library together with the preceding volume.

T. T. S. INGRAM

ACUTE HEMIPLEGIAS AND HEMISYNDROMES IN CHILDHOOD By W. Isler. (Translated by E. H. Burrows.) (Pp. 314; illustrated; £4.80.) Heine-mann: London. 1971.

The *Clinics in Developmental Medicine* publications have twice made a major contribution to the understanding of hemiplegia occurring in childhood. Their first volume reporting the study group held at Clevedon in 1961 drew attention to the size of the problem, the many aetiological factors suggested, and the many gaps in our knowledge. This new volume, the work of the paediatric neurologist from Zurich, is a very comprehensive study of the causation and modes of presentation of hemiplegia in infancy and childhood. It is not limited to a study of the syndrome which, by common usage, has come to be known as 'acute infantile hemiplegia' but deals