migraine: evolution of a common disorder  By 
Oliver Sacks. (Pp. 220; illustrated; £1.60.) Faber 
This is a second and slightly shortened edition of the 
work published in 1971. It brings a fresh approach to 
the subject by viewing it in biological rather than 
limited medical terms. Under the heading ‘the 
experience of migraine’, the enormous variety of 
signs and symptoms which can constitute an attack 
are discussed. This is a valuable collection of clinical 
experience. It provides not only descriptions of the 
established varieties of migraine, but also examples 
of the diagnostic borderlands, the migraine equiva-
lents. In a second section entitled ‘The occurrence of 
migraine’ the factors which induce an attack are 
considered. The author sees these as essential 
biological situations, not simply as limited environ-
mental factors, whether internal or external; though 
these must play their part. He also disputes the 
importance of genetic factors, pointing out alternative 
explanations even when migraine clearly runs in 
families. In a last section on ‘therapeutic approaches’, 
specific drug treatment, both preventative and 
curative of a given attack, is discussed. The author 
emphasizes particularly the value of psychotherapy. 
His general viewpoint is in many ways Meyerian 
psychobiology brought up to date.
This book is a useful clinical treatise on migraine. 
It also displays a facility of exposition and an 
appreciation of the wider values of life which make it 
educative and entertaining reading.
C. W. M. Whitty

the surgery of the central nervous system  By 
D. W. C. Northfield. (Pp. 884; illustrated; 
The appearance of this book, written by one of the 
world’s leading neurosurgeons, has been eagerly 
awaited, ever since it was known that such a volume 
was being prepared. With characteristic precision 
and clarity, qualities which are apparent on every 
page, the author describes this work as a textbook 
for postgraduate students. He tells us in his preface 
how he himself sought in vain for a book which 
would guide him at the time of his first apprentice-
ship in neurological surgery 40 years ago. Today’s 
trainees in this field will have cause to be grateful for 
Mr Northfield’s perception of this lack, for his skill 
in accumulating his material, and for his massive 
industry in producing this work. Colleagues in 
related disciplines have assisted in its preparation, 
but this is essentially a one-author book. The empha-
sis throughout is on basic scientific principles, 
pathology, careful clinical examination, and evalua-
tion of current methods of treatment. Descriptions 
of the technical minutiae of operative surgery are 
deliberately omitted but there are helpful accounts 
of the main steps in the operations practised by the 
author. There are numerous illustrations, some in 
colour. At the end of each chapter is a very full list of 
references. Although the book is designed primarily 
for those entering upon a career in neurosurgery, it 
will surely also become a standard work of reference 
for doctors practising in other fields. Despite its 
high price this volume is excellent value for money. 
It is a credit to all that is best in British surgery, and 
deserves to be widely read.
P. R. R. Clarke

anaesthesia mit gamma-hydroxibuttersäure  By 
W. Bushart and P. Rittmeyer. (Pp. 93; illustrated; 
A colloquium on experimental and clinical aspects of 
analgesia with gamma-hydroxybutyric acid was 
held at Hamburg-Eppendorf in October 1970. The 
importance of avoiding side-effects by the use of 
other drugs is again stressed. In spite of evidence of 
stimulating effects on the central nervous system, it 
is emphasized that this drug is a genuine anaesthes-
ical agent. Although there is agreement that an increase 
in central stimuli occurs, it is felt that these originate 
in the brain-stem and that the cerebral cortex is 
inhibited. Both these drugs may have some use, 
where a single agent is desirable—for example, 
repeated anaesthesia for burns dressings. The impres-
sion is given, however, that both should be avoided 
in neurosurgical anaesthesia.
John Barker

biochemistry, ultrastructure and physiology 
of cerebral anoxia, hypoxia and ischaemia  
Edited by M. M. Cohen. monographs in neural 
sciences, Vol. 1. (Pp. 129; illustrated; price not 
This short monograph contains chapters on the bio-
chemistry, cerebral ultrastructure and neuro-
physiological effects of experimental hypoxia and 
ischaemia of the brain. It is a report of a ‘workshop’ 
reviewing progress to which is added a lecture by H. 
McIlwain on the consequences of cerebral hypoxia 
examined at a tissue-metabolic level. The book 
contains little new material and the section on 
cerebral ultrastructure is disappointing, but as a 
whole, the book is a useful review of non-clinical 
literature.
J. A. Simpson

notice
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