Book reviews

EPILEPSY—A STUDY OF THE IDIOPATHIC DISEASE By William Aldren Turner. (Pp. 272; illustrated; £6.95.) Raven Press: New York. 1973.

Few medical books are worth reprinting more than 60 years after first publication, but there is sometimes an advantage in having a good account of careful clinical observations made before effective treatment was available. Although bromides had been in use long enough for the author to be sceptical of their value, this is substantially an account of the natural history of epilepsy as seen by a physician at the National Hospital and Chalfont-St Peter Colony for Epileptics at the beginning of this century. There are interesting statistics, though the selected nature of the population must be understood. Epilepsy due to known structural disease of the brain is excluded by definition, and the valuable contribution of EEG to the classification of minor epilepsy was not available. The author has the prejudices of his time. Thus, there is a great emphasis on 'stigmata of degeneration', on a so-called 'epileptic facies', and on 'neuropathic inheritance' including alcoholism in the parents. This, unfortunately, vitiates some of the statistical tables. Nevertheless, Turner's study of 1 000 cases provides an adequate standard of comparison of the treatment and prognosis of epilepsy. It is full of interesting comments and astute assessments which will strike a chord with contemporary neurologists. A facsimile edition of this classical study is entirely justified, and will be welcomed by the serious student of epilepsy for whom it is intended.

J. A. SIMPSON

CATATONIA By K. L. Kahlbaum. (Pp. 102; price not stated.) Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore. 1973.

What was catatonia is a question often asked today, for it is now rarely seen. 1974 marks the centenary of the publication of Kahlbaum's classic monograph *Die Katatonie oder das Spannungsirresein*, and here we have an English translation by Y. Levij and T. Pridan. For Kahlbaum, catatonia ('vesania catatonica') was a symptom-complex characterized by negativism, catalepsy, mutism, stereotypy and verbigeration, and by muscular symptoms. Kahlbaum's catatonia became enshrined in Kraepelin's classification of mental diseases, initially within the concept of dementia praecox and, later, of schizophrenia. Yet, throughout Kahlbaum's vivid case

histories, this neurological reviewer frequently catches flavour of extrapyramidal disease—that is, 'Choreiform facial tics ... went together with jerking spastic movements of the extremities'; 'Severe tonic contractions of the back muscles'; 'peculiar movements of the mouth ... "snout spasm"'; 'While walking he bent his knees ... and made the step down with the lateral part of the balls of his feet first'; 'a rigid, masklike facies'; 'he seems devoid of any will to move or react to any stimuli'; 'sitting in an immobile position, her limbs folded close to her body'; 'speech was usually slow'; 'a whispered "yes" and "no"'; '... involuntary rigidity of the limbs which often offers remarkable resistance to attempts at passive movement'.

But what of the florid melancholia, mania, and psychotic illness that Kahlbaum described as accompanying this motor disorder, and the apparent excellent prognosis for cure in many cases? One is left wondering if some of these patients were suffering from a post-encephalitic state. Kahlbaum's monogram is fascinating reading and we must be grateful to the American Association for the History of Medicine for providing the English translation, and to Dr G. Mora who has written the introduction.

C. D. MARSDEN

EXPLORATORY CONCEPTS IN MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY II Edited by A. T. Milhorat. (Pp. 664; illustrated; \$51.95.) Excerpta Medica: Amsterdam. 1974.

This is the second volume devoted to exploratory concepts in muscular dystrophy, the first having appeared eight years ago. Like the first, it is a landmark towards our understanding of the mechanisms that operate in the neuromuscular diseases. Although we are no nearer an appreciation of the defect or defects which operate in the genetically determined dystrophies, this symposium shows that it is not likely to come until we know more about the control and regulation of development of the skeletal muscle fibre.

The Muscular Dystrophy Associations of America in cooperation with the Italian National Research Council performed a useful service in bringing together scientists from many different disciplines in Arizona in the Autumn of 1973, and in publishing their deliberations within such a relatively short time. Fortunately, the discussions of participants after each paper or group of papers are included, and the attempts of molecular biologists, pharmacolo-