Book reviews


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


What was catatonia 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 Spannungsrirrsein, and here we have an English translation by Y. Levij and T. Pridan. For Kahlbaum, catatonia (‘vesania catatonia’) 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 tic . . . 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


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-
Logicians, physiologists, biochemists, histochemists, pathologists, and clinicians to understand each other (and in so doing make points clear to the reader) can be appreciated. The participants were fortunate to have with them A. N. Studitsky, of Moscow, who was able to describe his pioneering work in muscle transplantation. The neurogenic theory in the aetiology of muscular dystrophy is explored in depth, and the myogenic theory defended with equally powerful arguments by Cosmos. It is evident that some of the early evidence for the neurogenic theory based on muscle transplants between normal and dystrophic mice can no longer be defended in view of the opposite results obtained in the dystrophic chicken model and in cross-innervation experiments using parabiotic mice. As a contribution to the difficulties of fibre typing by existing methods which do not necessarily correlate with the physiological characteristics of the fibre, Perry describes new knowledge in the realm of the regulatory and contractile proteins in skeletal muscle, opening up the possibility of typing slow and fast twitch muscle by their content of the inhibitory protein, troponin I. Rash and his colleagues show how the freeze-fracture method may demonstrate new classes of membrane particles at the neuromuscular junctions of normal, denervated, and dystrophic neuromuscular junctions in mice.

There is a wealth of information in this book, which must be consulted by all who are interested in research in neuromuscular disease.

D. G. F. Harriman

A Manual of Head Injuries in General Surgery

This is a pocket-sized book which admirably fulfils its object. It is written for the non-specialist surgeon who may be called upon to deal with head injuries, and its audience would include registrars, students, and nurses. The information it contains is presented in an easily acceptable fashion with numerous headings and small paragraphs. It is illustrated by simple line drawings, has a small but well-selected bibliography to each chapter, and a good selection of multiple-choice questions. Being designed for the non-specialist, the methods of investigation are essentially clinical, but there is an adequate simple description with good diagrams on the use of angiography in head injuries. Since even in Great Britain most head injuries are dealt with by non-specialists, a clear understanding of a routine approach to the management of head injuries is essential to general surgeons, who should be prepared to assess and, when necessary, to operate on the head injured patient.

John Hankinson

Central Rhythmic and Regulation Circulation

As the title might suggest this is a curious publication of 97 contributions, mainly of European origin, delivered at a symposium in Berlin in 1972. The theme of the conference was the cerebral control of visceral and motor function. About 30% of the papers are on respiration, 30% are on blood pressure and the heart, and 30% are on the sympathetic nervous system. A few papers, mainly of clinical nature, are concerned with the basal ganglia. Odd chapters caught the reviewer's eye: Korsakewitz et al.'s description of carotid sinus nerve stimulation in man for angina controlled by feedback from pulse or blood pressure to mimic baroreceptor function; Wallin, Delius, and Hagbarth's account of micro-electrode recording from sympathetic neurones in mixed peripheral nerves in man; and Kim and Heidrich's account of stereotaxic hypothalatomy in a man for pedophila and Raynaud's disease (both abolished by the operation). But by and large, this must be a book for the specialist neurophysiologist, and perhaps only to remind him of the trip to Berlin.

C. D. Marden


The publication of the fourth edition of this synopsis of neurology is evidence of its continued popularity, and of its success in its evident main purpose, the passing of examinations. In addition to basic facts, a good deal of sensible advice is also given but the necessary condensation leads to some imbalance—for example, the Eaton-Lambert syndrome might well be sacrificed for a practical account of the management of Parkinson's disease. However, neurology clearly cannot be compressed into 200 pages in a manner entirely satisfactory to every reader, and the author is to be congratulated on his continued success in this difficult task.

W. B. Matthews

Recent Progress in Neurological Surgery

Relentless criticism of published conference proceedings has led some recent meetings to decide not to enshrine their deliberations in print at all. The present volume represents a more constructive response. It consists of five symposia and three special lectures which formed part of the international Congress of Neurological Surgery in Tokyo, and it is published only nine months after the meeting.