Book reviews


Knowledge of the nervous control of the heart has developed greatly in the last 15 years, and this book is planned to bring together the findings. The book describes the sympathetic and parasympathetic control of the heart, the reflexes from the chest and from the heart itself which affect the heart, the mechanisms in the brain and spinal cord which mediate these reflexes, and the consequences for cardiac function of denervation as in transplantation. Chapters begin with a succinct historical review, and the editor has kept an excellent balance. The book fills its role well. It is largely concerned with animals, but brings out the clinical relevance of findings and concludes with a chapter on the neural effects on the ECG and heart rhythm.


All symposia proceedings have to contend with the inbuilt disadvantage that the need for their very existence can be questioned. Symposia on stroke have the extra handicap that they recur regularly and have to compete with similar symposia held in other places. The proceedings of the ninth Pfizer Symposium on Stroke have all of these problems but does have the advantage, for British readers at least, that two-thirds of the participants come from the United Kingdom. This gives a somewhat more pertinent feel to some of the papers, particularly in the sections on epidemiology. This is not to deny the importance of some of the transatlantic contributions which, with some others in the surgical section, give a hint of some significant advances in treatment of aneurysms. The overall message sadly, however, is not very optimistic despite the enthusiasm and hard work of so many clearly dedicated people. Although it is recognised that stroke in old age may be perhaps more acceptable, the lessons gained from investigating and treating these, even with little dramatic result may eventually lead to some more useful way to combat this unkind wrecker of normal life when it occurs in the younger patient.


It is hard to believe that these conferences have attained the dignity of having been held over a period of 22 years. This one concentrates on selected aspects of the problem but even so cannot escape the plethora of facts and figures which make reading and understanding of the message so difficult. The surgical contributions, particularly on microsurgical anastomosis offer a more finite topic with a more hopeful therapeutic message. Not a book for bedside reading.


To review the advances in clinical neurology over the 25 years since the formation of the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke without writing a short textbook of neurology is quite a problem since these years have seen the establishment of neurology as an independent clinical discipline, with major advances in many areas. This volume does not succeed quite so well as the first volume, The Basic Neurosciences. It may be relevant that the most important advances are in those subjects where biochemistry has been available, as in the lipidoses and other metabolic problems.