Book reviews


The author in his preface outlines his aim to preserve Lord Brain's original intention of producing a small book essentially for the nonspecialist giving the diagnosis and treatment of common neurological disorders. In this, the fifth edition in 18 years, the book has expanded and a large amount of Lord Brain's original material has been superseded but still familiar illustrations and pictures remain. The book has been enhanced by the addition of sections on the disconnection syndromes, drug-induced dyskinesias, visual evoked responses, as well as bringing other sections generally up-to-date. There is also a well-illustrated section on computerised axial tomography, showing common abnormalities. The traditional format of the book remains and serves as an excellent introduction to the understanding of the basic pathophysiology of diseases of the nervous system. There are several points, however, particularly on the therapeutic side, which will need attention in further editions if this book is to maintain its place among the valuable primers in neurology. The classification of epilepsy is out-of-date, and the section on management here does not give a balanced account of treatment, particularly with reference to the drugs now most commonly used. I was surprised also at the statement that "surgical reconstruction of atheromatous cerebral vessels represents one of the most striking advances of the past decade." I would also have liked to know which patients with transient ischaemic attacks the author would wish to investigate. This certainly is a question nonspecialists are constantly asking. There is no mention of antifibrinolytic drugs in the management of subarachnoid haemorrhage nor plasmapheresis in myasthenia gravis or pizotifen in migraine. The advice regarding the timing of the use of steroids in Bell's palsy is also debatable.

The value of this book is undisputed with regard to the basic principles of diagnosis and manifestations of nervous system disease. I trust that the therapeutic side will improve in further editions to give the nonspecialist a good account not only of nervous diseases, but also of the treatment of the most common ones. The book remains, however, warmly recommended.

J. Bone


The second of the new series of Recent Advances, presented as an Anglo-American venture with contributors from Great Britain, the United States, and Australia, is a microcosm of many of the most interesting ideas in contemporary neurological practice, bearing in mind that epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and cerebrovascular disease were reviewed in the last volume. It is interesting to see that cerebral blood flow studies have not affected clinical practice to a significant extent, whereas EEG in its recent development of evoked potentials is back in the centre of the stage with two excellent chapters by Halliday and Rudge, the latter also including a valuable summary of vestibulo-ocular disorders. Rowland has written an excellent review of some of the advances in myasthenia gravis with appropriate reservations about the value of steroid and immunosuppressive treatment. Old problems reviewed in refreshingly new ways are adenohypophysal tumours (Collins), migraine (Lance), aphasia and apraxia (Benson), all worth reading for their fresh insights as much as for new facts. Fishman discusses the pathophysiology of brain edema (chapters use British or American spelling according to source) with trenchant criticism of indiscriminate use of steroids, and Briggs gives a well-balanced survey of recent work on raised intracranial pressure with particular reference to normal pressure hydrocephalus. There is an excellent review of CAT scanning (du Boulay) organised according to the clinical problem. The editors give short but valuable reviews of trends in multiple sclerosis and treatment of acute ischaemic stroke (Matthews), progressive dialysis encephalopathy, and brain death (Glaser).

This is a book to read from cover to cover and retain for reference. It is well produced and adequately illustrated. Even ultramicrograph and CAT scan prints are reasonably reproduced. Only the reference lists let it down. Some dates do not match the first reference and a magnum opus appears as the Handbook of Clinical Neurology—not a Freudian slip I hope.

J. A. Simpson


This annual publication presents a literature review up to April 1978 and is prefaced by an innovatory 60 points for Clinicians, comprising a stimulating (and punishing) assessment course. As in previous years, the editors provide brief observations as footnotes to the abstracts, in most cases providing a helpful condensation of opinion, as well as data. The compressed presentation of the statistics, however, remains difficult to digest.

In the neurological introduction Russell De Jong selects for special mention Gajdusek's work on the degenerative diseases of the brain which may arise from slow virus multiplication; the diagnostic revolution brought about by the computerised tomographic technique; the improvement in the drug treatment of Parkinson's disease; and the contributions by geneticists and immunologists to the continuing riddle of multiple sclerosis.

Oscar Sugar in his editorial introduction expresses American neurosurgeons' concern about possible government intervention and direction in neurosurgery, describing "the threat to the doctor-patient relationship implicit in the Psychosurgical affair." He asks why patients with mental disease every now and then as real as basal ganglion disease should not have the same surgical oppor-