Book reviews

The Cerebral Venous System and its Disorders. Edited by John P Kapp & Henry H Schmidek. (Pp 637; £28.50.) London/New York: Grune & Stratton Inc, 1984.

When one considers the number of books that are available on "cerebro-vascular disease" one realises that this term is regarded by many people as almost synonymous with disease of the cerebral arteries. The cerebral venous system has received comparatively scant attention, at any rate in the UK, and this is perhaps illustrated by the fact that in this impressive multi-authorship volume devoted to the venous side of the cerebral circulation, only one British author is amongst the contributors. But what a fascinating book this is; even the anatomy, clearly and succinctly described, makes absorbing reading. I have always felt one enjoys reading anatomy very much more when one already has had some practical experience of using it clinically, rather than when it was merely the introduction to a subject. Cerebral venous anatomy is known in detail to relatively few, and the first five chapters give an exciting account of gross and microscopic morphology, the embryology, and those variations from the average that are so much a feature of venous anatomy as opposed to arterial. Three chapters then deal with matters physiological, and these are followed by the main part of the book dealing first with clinical features produced by lesions of specific venous pathways, and going on through neuro-ophthalmological aspects, to the effects of lesions of the venous sinuses, the cortical veins, and the deep cerebral veins. Venous anomalies are much less familiar to the clinician than arterial, and these are described in detail and illustrated beautifully, and to keep one's interest from flagging there is an absorbing review of the results of separating craniophagus twins. Clearly arterio-venous fistulae have an important place in this book, and this includes an excellent account of carotico-cavernous fistulae, where again the important variations in anatomy are stressed to show how these correlate with the interesting variations in the clinical presentation of this condition—something other publications so rarely seem to attempt. The effects of arterial anomalies upon venous behaviour is well illustrated both in this context and in a chapter on the intracavernous aneurysms. The book ends with a discussion of the surgical problems and potential related to the intracranial

venous system.

I have rarely seen so profusely illustrated a book which is not just an "atlas." On a rough count approximately 550-575 photographs are reproduced, many of which are full page, in which definition is excellent on the high quality paper that is used. One would expect the cost of this to be prohibitive, yet the price of the book is only £28.50 which in these days for a publication of this length and quality is remarkable.

My only major criticism is that some authors appear still to look upon benign intracranial hypertension, otitic hydrocephalus and transverse sinus thrombosis as the same condition. Our sole British contributor deals firmly with this muddle, but it is a little confusing in some other chapters.

This is an almost unique publication and of inestimable value to neurologists, neurosurgeons and neuroradiologists. The authors, the editors, and certainly the publishers are to be warmly congratulated.

EDWIN BICKERSTAFF

Excitotoxins. (Wenner-Gren International Symposium Series; Vol 39.) Edited by Kjell Fuxe, Peter Roberts & Robert Schwartz. (Pp 362; £40.00.) Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984.

It is now some 20 years since the excitatory effects of glutamate on neurons was first demonstrated. Since that time it has proved exceptionally difficult to show unequivocally its role as a true brain neurotransmitter substance. A major problem has been the involvement of glutamate in many other processes in brain including energy metabolism and fatty acid synthesis. However, despite these difficulties it has become accepted that many brain regions contain glutamate-utilising neurons and that glutamate plays a major role in neuronal transmission.

This volume contains the proceedings of a Wenner-Gren International Symposium on Excitotoxins held in 1982. The heterogeneous collection of papers contained in the volume emphasises the wide interest which exists in the area of excitatory amino acids. The initial chapters emphasise the wide distribution of glutamate-containing pathways in brain and the apparent existence of multiple types of excitatory amino acids receptors. Major advances have been in the synthesis of excitatory amino acid analogues and this

has led to a degree of pharmacological specificity of action which was not previously available. This has led to many of the major advances which are described in the volume.

As the title suggests many of the excitatory amino acid analogues cause cell death. The mechanism underlying such effects are of interest in relation to disease states and ample space is given to reports of such investigations. Similarly, these neurotoxic agents are useful in themselves as tools for investigating brain function in a variety of research areas and later chapters provide examples of their use. Finally, the volume deals with the potential role of excitatory amino acids in disease states underlying epilepsy, Huntington's chorea and dementia.

An interesting volume for those concerned with this area of research. Although the reports date from 1982 it still provides an adequate summary of current thinking in the field of excitatory amino acids.

PETER JENNER

Life Support Systems in Intensive Care. Editors: Robert H Bartlett, Walter M Whitehouse, Jeremiah Turcotte, Mary M Harper. (Pp 614; £47.50.) Chicago: Year Book Medical Publishers Inc; UK Distributors: Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1984.

This book is rather disappointing in that it is larger than necessary, is extremely uneven in the presentation of the material and at no stage seems quite clear as to the audience for which it is designed. It is a multiple author product, which tries to cater for all levels, from the medical student to the specialist and deals with various concepts of intensive care, starting at an elementary level and sometimes unfortunately pursuing a rather qualitative format in the style of a standard textbook, rather than a specialist publication.

The book is set out in terms of general physiological considerations in relation to management covering measurement and monitoring and the support of individual failing organs and the all important concept of protecting healthy organs at the same time. Quite specifically, it excludes chronic organ failure, neonatal and paediatric intensive care, with the interesting omission also of burns and not surprisingly, not touching on artificial organs in chronic care. The individual chapters on measuring and monitoring attempt to cover the principles from an elementary standpoint and