Book reviews

Surgery of Spine Trauma. Edited by PAUL R MEYER, Jr. (Pp 608; illustrations 610; £99.50.) Churchill Livingstone, 1989.

This beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated volume is prepared by a United States Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery who has chosen as his colleagues a parochial team of almost exclusively Illinois colleagues. The three Neurosurgeons, also from Illinois have been used only to discuss a small section on head injuries.

It is a little difficult to know at whom the book is aimed. Acute injury retrieval, splinting techniques and on-site care, which are well covered are obviously better suited to ambulance personnel and doctors likely to be called to acute emergencies. Even for them, pictures of car crashes and simulated photographs of persons floating underwater, head down and motionless are not the least helpful because of their naivité and the low levels of information supplied by such illustrations. Likewise, cluttered illustrations of the scene of emergency intubation, assorted victims of accidents or pieces of apparatus in use have no value whatever. At the opposite extreme, in respect of specialization there is a well written and excellently illustrated section on embryology.

The sections on conservative and operative management of spinal injuries which comprise the bulk of the book are well done and clearly illustrated. The pictures and radiographs outlining some of the complications and dealing with individual illustrative cases are well chosen and informative.

There are some striking omissions. For example, although Frankel grades are mentioned they are not described. There is no mention of the Karnofsky scale, of Caspar plates or Hartshill rectangles. The Cone method of fusion which may be preferred for Hangman's fracture or Jefferson's fractures is not mentioned. Even more startlingly, syringomyelia is not discussed, not even under the heading of cystic myelomalacia. The usefulness of the references is limited by the lack of complete pagination.

One criticism sometimes levelled at United States surgeons concerned with spinal injuries management is that operations are often unnecessarily embarked upon. This book reflects a change in that attitude, stressing that "emergency surgery is rarely indicated" (sic). Laminectomy is only mentioned to be condemned and in the index it is only listed under inappropriate indications. No appropriate indications are discussed, even in the patients with ascending neurological deficits. Even Guttman was prepared to discuss surgery in the presence of

ascending deficits, particularly when there was a possibility of an epidural haematoma or haematomyelia; but in this book the indications even for myelography under such circumstances are not discussed. Other indications for myelography are sensibly expanded.

It is perhaps unfortunate to have produced a book of this size and very considerable content just before magnetic resonance scanning became readily available. There is no doubt that someone of Dr Meyer's energy will be working on a second edition which will hopefully contain the results of what, in his busy service in Chicago, must be a very productive source of information about the MRI changes in acute spinal injury.

It might be hoped that he would achieve a better balance in the authorship and presentation of his book if he does it again. It could well be slimmer and a more workmanlike volume next time, with a little more neurosurgical input, particularly on post-traumatic syringomyelia, and no irrelevant photographs; but no diminution in the contribution of skilful work of the illustrator, Ms Kathryn Sisson.

BERNARD WILLIAMS

Merritt's Textbook of Neurology. 8th Edition. Edited by LEWIS P ROWLAND. (Pp 964; £49.50.) Beckenham: Lea & Febiger (UK) Ltd, 1989.

New textbooks of Neurology always excite interest and expectation. Comprehensiveness, concision, a contemporary flavour, and a balanced account are qualities most would seek. Added spice may be found in the inclusion of personal slants, and the odd wry comment may enliven the text. Reference lists should not be exhaustive, but should indicate the best recent reviews, landmarks of scientific progress and the occasional publication of historical interest. Amongst a multitude of modern texts in the English tongue, few survive to achieve multiple editions. Walton's editions of Brain, Adams and Victor, and Houston Merritt are the outstanding larger texts.

In this eighth edition, Lewis Rowland has updated the last edition which was prepared by Merritt's students and included seventy contributors—an outstanding tribute. The present writers include many of the most distinguished neurologists in the United States.

They have retained the same basic layout. New material includes splendid illustrations

of MRI photographs, a section on neurovascular imaging, an account of AIDS and numerous advances in current neuro-radiology, immunology, genetics and infections such as Lyme disease.

Rowland's text is of manageable size, is certainly comprehensive. There are however, a few minor grouses. The section on peripheral nerve lesions is disappointing with sparse mention of prognosis, and a section on carpal tunnel syndrome which is considerably shorter than that on metachromatic leukodystrophy; there is no mention of the anterior interosseous nerve lesion. Therapeutics is well handled in epilepsy, Parkinsonism and MS, but somewhat dated and lacking detail and incisive guidance in migraine and Guillain-Barré syndrome. Consideration of prognosis is all important, especially to newcomers to the specialty and is often glossed over; this stands out in sections on post-traumatic syndromes and, spinal injury. Whiplash injury hardly receives mention.

I like the selection of references, even if they are heavily biased towards the US literature. I have always found the tables listing aggregates of large recent series of cases a most useful feature, and similarly no chance of providing a modern classification is missed. These aspects and the references emit an aura of an up-to-date compilation combined with objective data which assists the inexperienced in achieving perspective. I found the text clearly written, remarkably free of jargon and lavishly illustrated to a very high standard.

By comparison "Brain" is now showing signs of incipient ageing and lacks the clarity of tabulated data and profuse illustrations; "Adams and Victor" probes more deeply and what it lacks in presentation is more than compensated for by the more detailed and scholarly approach; it is of course a larger book to handle and remains my personal favourite.

To pick out individual contributions is invidious in a uniformly excellent text. This book can unhesitatingly be commended to postgraduates in the Neurosciences and to established physicians. It should find a place in every neurologist's personal collection.

JMS PEARCE

Human Organic Memory Disorders. By Andrew R Mayes. (Pp 300; H/b £30.00 P/b £10.95.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

This book is the 7th volume in a new series, entitled *Problems in the Behavioural Sciences*,