fold. It is recommended to all those working in the area although the price may well be a deterrent for some pockets (presumably it has been inflated by the number of illustrations). Dr Swash and Dr Schwartz are to be congratulated for omitting to make any mention of that well-known, non-existent entity ME!

P HUDSON

Recent Advances in Epilepsy. Edited by TA Pedley, BS Meldrum. (Pp 266; £45-00.) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1988.

This is the fourth edition in a series which began in 1983. The format is the same as that of successful previous editions, presenting high quality review articles that span animal experimental and clinical fields of epilepsy with well known authors working on both sides of the Atlantic. Experimental areas explored in this edition include mechanisms of seizure initiation and spread, the kindling model of epilepsy and amino-acid abnormalities in epilepsy. The majority of the book is clinically orientated with chapters on the role of the EEG, teratogenicity of drugs and the management of pregnancy in women with epilepsy. The field of new antiepileptic drugs is covered and the position of corpus callosotomy in the treatment of intractable epilepsy is reviewed. Two concluding chapters deal with the problems of the medicolegal consequences of epilepsy and epileptic automatism. A novel and interesting chapter is included on parasitosis of the central nervous system and epilepsy.

Inevitably, it is possible to criticise some of the chapters as being available in a very similar form in other publications. In those volumes particular interest often arises in comparing European practice in the management of epilepsy with that of the USA. Perhaps this is most clearly reflected in the opening sentence of the chapter on the management of seizures during pregnancy. This would suggest that the major concerns in the author's mind are the "medical legal consequences of caring for women with epilepsy", a concern that might not be uppermost in the minds of most European clinicians approaching this problem. Professor Porter's chapter very fully covers the problems of evaluation of new antiepileptic drugs. The chapter does not, however, address the current controversy surrounding the use of cross-over or parallel group designs and nor does it discuss the current problems being presented to investigators in this area by major disagreements that exist between regulatory authorities on each side of the Atlantic on the necessity or otherwise of actively controlled monotherapy studies at an early stage in the assessment of new antiepileptic drugs.

As always, the main value of this volume is that it brings together authoritative review articles within a single volume. There is no doubt that anyone with an interest in epilepsy or responsible for the care of patients with epilepsy will find something of interest within this book and, like its predecessors, it will remain an important review and reference source for some time to come.

DW CHADWICK


This book consists of a series of high quality articles based on a Ciba Foundation Symposium which was concerned with key questions on the pathogenesis of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. It is largely concerned with scrapie but also includes Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, kuru, Gerstmann-Strassler disease, mink encephalopathy and chronic wasting disease. Almost all of the articles are concerned with the possible nature of the scrapie agent and the pathogenesis of these diseases. The remarkable nature of the so-called unconventional virus diseases includes the long incubation periods, the agent's resistance to a variety of procedures which inactivate conventional viruses, the absence of immune responses and the unknown nature of the infectious agent itself. A major advance in this field was made in 1981 with the discovery of scrapie-associated fibrils which are now known to occur in most if not all cases of unconventional virus disease. The suggestion then emerged on the basis of further studies that these diseases were due to a novel infectious agent termed prion which was postulated to be a self-replicating protein. It is now clear that a glycoprotein called PrP is the major constituent of scrapie-associated fibrils. This protein is present in normal as well as scrapie-infected brains although the form associated with infected tissues has different physical characteristics which may be due to biochemical modification.

This field is a controversial one and this is reflected by the various articles and to an even greater extent by the very rigorous and lively discussions which follow them. Almost all of the subject matter concerns scrapie and it should be remembered that experimental scrapie in mouse and hamster has provided most of our understanding of the neuropathogenesis of these infections. All of the contributions contain some experimental details although some have a more general remit and there are a number of excellent introductory paragraphs even in the highly technical contributions. There are chapters on the clinical neurology of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and the neuropathology of unconventional virus infections and these are followed by an excellent chapter by Kimberlin and Walker on the pathogenesis of experimental scrapie. This is followed by a number of chapters which address the various theories of scrapie pathogenesis. It comes over very clearly that no one knows what constitutes the scrapie agent. The main possibilities are that the scrapie agent is a virus with unconventional properties, so-called "virotoxin" in which the infectious form of the agent is a hybrid between a scrapie-specific nucleic acid and a protective host protein, or that the agent is a modified host protein. There are various chapters discuss the pros and cons of these theories with varying degrees of enthusiasm. There is a number of highly technical chapters which the clinical neurologist, without a background in this field will find hard going. Of particular interest to neurologists, however, will be the chapter on the pathogenesis of amyloid formation in Alzheimer's disease, Down's syndrome and scrapie.

I personally found this volume extremely stimulating and I particularly enjoyed the detailed and lively discussions following each chapter which themselves included much useful information, both published and unpublished, and there is a separate reference list following the discussions. Anyone familiar with the sometimes heated exchanges at scientific meetings between the various groups working in this field will not be surprised at the rigour of the discussions in this volume and this adds greatly to the book's success. There are very clear and succinct introductory and concluding pages by F Brown and one is left with little doubt that the key questions in this field, most notably the final demonstration as to whether the scrapie agent is indeed a nucleic acid or a self-replicating protein, or both, should not be too far off in the future.

In summary, this volume gives the state of the art in the scrapie field and, although very technical in places, will be of considerable
interest to clinical neurologists as well as those managing infectious diseases, virologists and also neurosurgeons and psychiatrists. The book is well produced, reasonably priced, well referenced and stimulating. It should be on the shelves of all good neurological libraries.

PGE KENNEDY


This is a valuable reference handbook of clinical psychoneuroendocrinology. The large and rapidly growing subject is reviewed in 24 chapters. Between them they cover most of the principle findings in the field together with about 5000 key references.

Although the coverage is in general comprehensive many of the sections are lacking in critical perspective and, in general, studies are quoted together with an automatic acceptance of the authors' conclusions. The subject is now at a stage where the reader may be justified in accepting 50% of the data that are published but he should hesitate if he finds that he is accepting more than 10% of the conclusions. With this proviso the book will provide a useful introduction to the subject.

S CHECKLEY


As the author makes clear at the outset, computers are increasingly in evidence in medicine and it is now becoming difficult to ignore them. Unfortunately, they are surrounded by a lot of obscure jargon which puts many people off learning to use one or finding out more about computing in general. In fact, as computers and particularly modern software packages have become more sophisticated and "user friendly", it has become quite unnecessary to be bothered with almost all technical matters in order to be able to use even a very powerful computer and it is refreshing to see this point made in the first few pages of the book. It is much more useful to be aware of what computers can do and the author provides this information in a concise and readable way. There is helpful information about the various types of computer system which explains what sort of computer will perform a particular task and what sort of software will be needed. The various types of software packages are fully explained. There are also useful explanations of computing terms which will be of use to those seeking to evaluate the various technical specifications provided by the manufacturers of different machines.

Subsequent chapters cover computerised record systems, other aspects of administration including a clear account of the varieties and uses of databases; computerised diagnostic equipment; the crucial subject of transferring data into a computer and in what form; computerised diagnostic systems and the controversy surrounding their use; the use of computers in treatment and finally programs to assist in teaching and literature searches.

In the areas of diagnosis and treatment it is never suggested that computers should or could replace the human brain as in some respects they are not well suited to these tasks. However, examples of use in these areas are presented as food for thought such as spotting rare but important drug interactions, the identification of rare syndromes or the choice of the most appropriate chemotherapeutic regimen according to a protocol previously fed into a computer's memory.

Some of the information, particularly the rather technical section on the computerisation of diagnostic recording equipment, is of little general interest but the author has mostly avoided this type of approach to the subject.

There has been a real need for a book like this which provides a good introduction to medical aspects of computing and is probably more than most of us will ever need to know. It summarises all that is needed to give confidence to anyone approaching computers for the first time. The book will be especially useful to anyone new to computers embarking on a research project where computerised data processing is required. Regrettably £18 seems a lot for this small paperback and will probably discourage some from buying it.

NA FLETCHER


American neurologists are well recognised to be generous to their retiring and retired senior colleagues. Recently at the annual meeting of the American Neurological Association, a spoken tribute was paid to Joe Foley and concurrently Butterworths have published "Contributions to Contemporary Neurology", a tribute to Joseph Michael Foley.

Forty-one authors have contributed to this beautifully produced and reasonably priced collection of essays. As one would expect, the majority of the contributing authors are practising in North America or Canada with the exception of Dr Simoncini and Dr Stuhmer from the Max Plank Institute in the GFR and Michael Swash from the London Hospital. The essays were collected following a meeting held in March 1986 in Cleveland to honour Dr Foley. It was then his seventieth birthday and the papers delivered at that symposium now comprise this volume of dedication.

Reading the account of Foley's neurological life one senses the warm affection felt for this eminent American neurologist, a place of eminence justified and endorsed by his Curriculum Vitae presented as an appendix to this collection of essays.

The authors combine to produce twenty essays and I feel it would perhaps be invidious to select particular contributions for a special comment. Areas of considerable interest, exciting areas of research development and standard essays on many aspects of neurological disease comprise the collection. Understandably Richard Johnson writes on acquired immunodeficiency. The advent of PET scanning is recognised. Who better than Betty Banker to write on dermatomyositis and the polymyositis syndromes and Monro-e Cole on aspects of rehabilitation? The essays are all short but comprehensive as one would expect from their provenance. I feel the volume deserves to be well read. The standard of the printing is exceptional, the editing accurate and this collection of essays fulfils its purpose in honouring Dr Foley.

JB FOSTER


This slim volume represents the proceedings of the First European Conference on Myasthenia Gravis held in June 1987. The book contains contributions from several distinguished researchers in myasthenia, the majority concentrating on current immunological work in the disease rather than clin-