BOOK REVIEWS

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Few neurologists would disagree that Motor Neurone Disease is one of the cruellest disorders which we see. The progressive whittling away of motor function in patients who suffer usually with such gentleness and calmness fails to touch even the most battle-hardened clinician. Exacerbating neurologists' frustrations is the feeling that we understand so little of the pathogenesis of this group of diseases. From Professor Williams comes this attempt at "...a lively overview of where the action is in Motor Neurone Disease circles". It seems that we have gone some way from the extraordinarily unexplanatory concept of 'Atrophy of the motor neurones' with which most of us grew up.

The first section contains valuable chapters on the clinical features of MND/ALS, the Spinal Muscular Atrophies and of the various inflammatory and hereditary neuropathies which may confuse the diagnosis. Included here is the infuriatingly elusive Multifocal Motor Neuropathy with conduction block and its attendant unresolved story of the anti-GM1-antibodies. Fully covered are the Post Polio Syndrome and the enigmatic MND-Parkinson Dementia complex. Few chapters in this section fail but in the Wisconsin group's on the natural history thought seems to have been drowned in data. However Nick Murray follows this with excellent coverage of the clinical neurophysiology of MND.

The section on clinical management will be of great practical value to clinicians. UK neurologists, challenged by the more aggressive management of respiratory complications promoted in the USA may feel that they are too nihilistic about the techniques available for symptom control as opposed to prolongation of life. The comprehensiveness of this section is exemplified by Rosalind Pegg's articulate and moving chapter recording her nightmare journey with her husband through all the stages of his MND. This is compulsive reading for those doing their inadequate best for MND patients.

Least satisfactory is the section covering the mesoscientific background to MND research. Certainly there is good coverage of the molecular biology of familial MND/ALS, including recent identification of the CuZnSOD gene mutation, although later this has to be added an addendum to Hardes Pall's thorough commentary on metals and free radicals. Elsewhere authors are too personal in their presentations. For example Patten mars a helpful (though hypodidactical) chapter on enigma and neurologists' frustrations with such incidental statements as "...although I have respect for the work of others, I tend to trust my own data more", which does not sound like a healthy scientific attitude. This section does however review the growing points in MND research, reinforcing the hope that the answer to this horrific disease lies somewhere in the new neuroscience of neurotrophic factors, excitatory toxicity, neurofilament biology and free radical biochemistry.

Clinicians will be the most helped by perusal of this book. I suspect those at the leading edge of MND research will be more critical, though Adrian Williams has probably succeeded in his aim of being "...outspoken and controversial...". CHRIS ALLEN


It is said that much academic enquiry is driven by the pursuit of self-knowledge. Being right-handed yet left-footed, I approached this book with some interest. Written by two American psychologists and now in its fourth edition, this book remains one of the most accessible accounts of current thought on cerebral hemispheric function.

Hemispheric asymmetry of structure and function is firstly considered, aided by accounts of brain-damaged, split-brain and normal subjects, and by state-of-the-art investigation such as PET imaging and magnetoencephalography. Clinical disorders of higher cortical function and left-handedness illustrate aspects of hemispheric asymmetry. Geschwind's fascinating theory of lateralisation is discussed, although it left-handedness, auto-immune disorders, and learning disorders are attributed to relative excess of testosterone in foetal development. Further topics considered include the influence of gender on laterality, and the evolution and development of asymmetry.

The role of asymmetry in psychiatric illness is also addressed. There are tantalising hints that schizophrenia and depression may be left- and right-hemisphere disorders, respectively. It is also suggested that corpus callosum enlacement in schiz- ophrenia may be a compensation for defective interhemispheric communication in this condition.

This text provides an excellent introduction to laterality for neurologists, psychologists and psychiatrists and also illuminates current research on the neuroanatomical localisation of brain function. JOHN GREENE

It is well recognised that the two hemispheres of the brain tend to subserve different functions. This book sets out to review evidence relevant to this theme from a different number of perspectives. Work dealing with anatomical asymmetries in brain, handedness and neuropsychological studies in both impaired and normal subjects are considered with a mixture of eclecticism and a comprehensive and integrated approach. The section fails in that it is not always fully up-to-date. For this reason this book stands as a useful addition to the literature but this offering falls down in a number of ways. There is an extensive, if not always fully up-to-date coverage of the literature but the level of critical analysis of the information presented is poor, non sequiturs appear far too often and the style of writing is sloppy. Faced with the passage 'Many of Wernicke's (1874) aphasis gener- ated output that resembled something akin to a word salad...when one patient was asked by Bradshaw and Nettleton (1983) how he felt...the reader is inclined to ponder on the remarkable longevity of subjects originally studied by Wernicke. This is despite the use of the italics, presumably to indicate that it is patients with aphasia of the kind described by Wernicke (1874) that are the focus of concern.'

Over recent years Lawrence Erlbaum have published a number of good texts on aspects of neuropsychology. This is clearly below their usual high standard. Despite this, Laccino offers the occasional snippet of interesting if offbeat information. This reviewer had not realised that parrots are predominantly left footed before reading this book!

E MILLER


This volume is accompanied by a series of stereo photographs in colour and a rather cute bright red viewer. The viewer and cards are a nostalgic reminder of the stereoscopic "views" of monuments and natural beauties which used to be generally available in the halcyon days before the camcorder and the video.

The stereo images are of good quality and in colour. They are a mixture of anatomical prospections and intraoperative photographs. Unfortunately, they are un captioned, and for those unfamiliar with the anatomy they require a rather laborious process of reference before or afterwards to the much duller black and white images in the accompanying text. The arrangement of the photographs both the stereoscopically images and the text conforms to the more commonly used surgical "approaches"—pterional, suboccipital, etc.

It is difficult to visualise at whom this material is aimed. For the undergraduate anatomy student it is probably over elaborated. For the neurosurgical trainee it may be of some value but will surely prove to be of no substitute for looking directly down the microscope at surgery, then referring to properly labelled illustrations, available in more conventional anatomical texts. However, both the stereo photographs and the text should be attractively packaged, and in common with most "heav-