Reviews and Notices of Books.


When a closely printed book of over 200 pages is seemingly required for a discussion of a part only of the functions of the labyrinth some idea of the intricacy and complexity of labyrinthine activity may be gained, but these are no more in evidence than is the uncertainty still surrounding it. Dr. de Nó appears almost overwhelmed by the amount of ignorance still obtaining in regard even to the elements of the subject. He cites with cordial approval the dictum of Gudden: “Erst Anatomie und dann Physiologie, wenn aber zuerst Physiologie, dann nicht ohne Anatomie,” and then proceeds to show, as might be expected of a member of the Cajal school, how grossly incomplete even anatomical knowledge of labyrinthine central structures and connexions is. He gives beautiful drawings of vestibular nuclei and emphasises the fact that we do not know what three-quarters of them represent in anatomical relationships. “Es ist traurig, aber es ist wirklich so.”

The major part of the work is devoted to an account of the results of personal experiments on the neural mechanisms underlying the action of the labyrinth on ocular reflexes, and it leads to a highly technical investigation of the function of the semicircular canals along mathematical lines. In a concluding chapter a précis is given of the author’s conceptions, together with a critical review of some current theories. The technical nature of the book makes it rather hard reading even for those who are abreast of current research, but Dr. de Nó does not wish it otherwise. He repeatedly stresses his point, that hitherto schematisation of labyrinthine functions with a view to simplicity has proved a serious obstacle in the path of real advance.

Incidentally, the neurologist for whom perhaps some of this specialised investigation has but a secondary interest ought to note with particularity certain conclusions drawn in respect of mesencephalic function and the place occupied by the red nucleus in decerebrate states. Dr. de Nó has proved convincingly that longitudinal sections in medulla and pons, and transverse sections in the latter also, can and do produce decerebrate rigidity, as well as disappearance of existing righting-reflexes. In all of these animals the red nucleus was preserved intact, whence the conclusion is, that “the nucleus ruber cannot be the centre for the origination of righting-reflexes, or for the normal
apportionment of tone in the extremities." He therefore cannot support the contention of Magnus and Rademaker; on the contrary, his experiments suggest that the centres are in the substantia reticularis.

S. A. K. W.

Neurobiologische Studien am menschlichen Foetus. By M. Minkowski.


The first contribution in this section of Prof. Abderhalden's monumental Handbuch deals with the physiology of the foetus and opens up a new field. As can be understood, the living material, derived almost entirely from Cæsarean sections, has a very brief survival period and must be utilised quickly and systematically. Full details of the author's technique in this respect are furnished. It is not a little surprising, perhaps, that he has been able to investigate not merely the comparatively simple matter of reflexes (cutaneous and deep) but also the postural reactions of Magnus and de Kleijn and the electrical reactions of muscles; further, by appropriate experimentation attempts have been made to determine function at different neural levels.

Following Jacksonian conceptions, Prof. Minkowski draws an analogy between the results of dissolution effected by disease and the types of functional activity found in the foetus, but he states in more than one place that this likeness must not be taken too strictly.

In the second contribution the reader is given a very complete account of the reflexes, usual and unusual, employed in clinical medicine, embracing not a few which deserve greater attention than is commonly allotted them. Of value are the references to the original descriptions. The term "reflex" is used with considerable latitude, since phenomena are here included which belong rather to the groups of spinal automatisms and mesencephalic reactions. The sole question in this respect that does not appear to be adequately dealt with is that of cortical "reflexes," and this is the more regrettable since they are now realised to be of considerable significance.


The author adopts the term "thymopathy" for the psychoneuroses in general and apparently also for some psychoses, and advocates a method of treatment which he believes to be efficacious in them. The essence of the method is the induction of a state of "half-sleep"—a state between sleeping and waking in which active attention is abolished, and when "unconscious" trends come to consciousness in the form of visual images, accompanied by their appropriate