Book Reviews


Neurology receives scant treatment in standard paediatric textbooks. Publications in the excellent series, Clinics in Developmental Medicine, have done much to remedy this. The latest addition, double volume 20/21, ably fills another gap. Despite the traditional high standard of adult neurology in Britain, paediatric case notes in this country rarely contain a systematic neurological examination. Richmond Paine and Thomas Oppé have effectively removed any excuse for this.

History taking directed towards a neurological child patient is first described. This is followed by a useful chapter on 'some particular symptoms', e.g. involuntary movements, floppiness, pica, which brings together information previously only available in original papers. A routine scheme of central nervous system examination is outlined. In succeeding chapters, the component parts of this examination are dealt with in very considerable detail: ranging through assessment of mental state, speech, cranial nerve function, gait, motor function, reflex activity, sensation, and autonomic function. Practical details, special tricks and manoeuvres necessary at different ages are given, with information on the range of normal, and the age at which co-operation in the various tests can be expected.

However, this volume is far more than a handbook on examination technique, the implications of abnormal signs are fully discussed, and the authors have succeeded well in their 'hope of bridging the gap between mere techniques of examination and the making of an anatomical and aetiological diagnosis'. The section on infantile automatisms and their interpretation is particularly succinct. There is an interesting and informative chapter on special tests of cerebral function, in which it is stated, but perhaps insufficiently stressed, that very considerable experience is required in the giving and interpretation of these tests which would normally be carried out in conjunction with a clinical psychologist. The last chapter gives an up-to-date review of special investigations; again many would presumably be done in special centres in conjunction with consultants in other specialities. The illustrations are well chosen and clear.

This book is highly recommended to all established and aspiring paediatricians, and to neurologists who examine children. It should be available to post- and undergraduate students in teaching hospital libraries. The enjoyment of paediatric practice will be enhanced, because during an adequate examination of the nervous system one inevitably gets to know the child.

Biological Factors in Temporal Lobe Epilepsy. By CHRISTOPHER OUNSTED, JANET LINDSAY, and RONALD NORMAN. Clinics in Developmental Medicine No. 22. (Pp. 135; 27 figures + tables. 21s. or $3) London: Spastics Society Medical Education and Information Unit in Association with William Heinemann Medical Books, Ltd. 1966.

This nicely presented booklet of 135 pages starts with a very short but clear introduction by Gilbert H. Glaser, Professor of Neurology at Yale. In just over a page, he mentions the difficulties of classifying particular types of seizures involving behavioural automatisms, personality and thought disorders, and visceral disturbances. He promises a selection of provocative and stimulating data arising from the limited series of 100 cases presented clinically and many less presented anatomically.

Some of the clinical data analysed were part of Dr. Janet Lindsay's material for an M.D. thesis, but these are integrated by studies carried in Oxford on clinical and EEG features, and by a chapter by Dr. Ronald Norman from Bristol based on his own neuropathological material. The book is divided into 12 chapters and the authors have obviously taken a lot of trouble with the coding of their data in various directions. They also mention that the EEG evidence of temporal lobe discharge was a sine qua non of diagnosis in their 100 cases presented clinically. They also mention that 6 of their children in the study were dead by the time the data were coded. However, the excellent chapter on neuropathology (The Pathogenesis of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy), which is beautifully illustrated, does not specify how many, if any, of the cases illustrated are part of the clinical series.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand which of the 100 cases selected on clinical grounds are part of a series of 1000 children with seizures studied by Dr. Ounsted. This series of 1000 children is often mentioned in relation to particular aspects, such as the genetics and the role of status epilepticus (chapter 4, and chapter 2), but the reasons why the 100 patients were selected from this larger series is not very clear. It is also difficult to understand how the authors define what they call 'temporal lobe seizures'. However, in the group of 100 selected children, a prominent feature is the hyperkinetic syndrome which is said to be 'a common complication, and in many ways the gravest complication of temporal lobe epilepsy in childhood'. On the other