cerebral exercise. One of those whose cerebrum has been most exercised in this way over the last 20 years is the author of this book which completes a quadrumvirate of monographs that have contributed to my own education on the subject over the years.1-3 the foundation of my interest having been Dr Lennox-Buchthal's little gem which must surely stand as a medical classic.

Dr Wallace has produced a detailed, thoughtful, scholarly, comprehensive, and up to date review of the subject. Of the 412 references, 160 are to publications in the present decade (14 are pre-1900 and 10 pre-1750!). Some indication of the extent of the author's own contribution to the subject is given by the fact that some 25 of the references are to her own publications. It is doubtful, though, whether 'unpublished data' and 'presented to the Annual Meeting of the . . . . Association' should have found their way into the list of references.

The main message of the book is that 'the child who presents with a febrile seizure is providing an acute indication that all may not be well with his/her nervous system'. Evidence is presented that febrile convulsions are commonly associated with neurological abnormality. As regards major neurological problems, this association largely results from the all embracing definition of febrile seizures as 'any seizure of cerebral origin which occurs in association with any feverish illness'. Such a definition, while perfectly logical, leads, if unqualified, to ridiculous assertions such as that the death rate from febrile seizures has been as high as 11%. This statistic derives from a study of children who convulsed before dying of infection in the preantibiotic era and is obviously irrelevant to the subject of febrile convulsions as understood today. I do not myself subscribe to the doom and gloom school on this subject and I have yet to be convinced that a child who is apparently well after a febrile convolution is likely to benefit from a surfeit of medical concern.

This is an important book presenting the personal view of an expert on the subject whose own contribution demands that her view be considered seriously and respected, even though one may not agree with it in every detail.

References


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This is a description of clinical and pathological findings in 249 patients who underwent anterior temporal lobectomy at the hands of one surgeon over a 25 year period. The criteria for surgical intervention were frequent fits, inadequately controlled by drugs; focal, unilateral temporal lobe spike discharges on electroencephalography; no radiological evidence of tumour and IQ greater than 70. Most specimens of temporal lobes were examined in a systematic fashion and cases classified on the basis of histopathological findings within the resected lobe. The diagnostic criteria of each group are clearly described; clinical correlations and outcome are discussed within each diagnostic group. The volume is completed by a short conclusion which compares the benefits of surgery between groups, the bibliography, and appendices tabulating clinical details of all patients.

The format of the book is attractive and the style makes it easy to read. The quality of illustrations is good but I would have liked to see more photomicrographs to illustrate the range of abnormalities in the 'alien tissue' and 'indefinite' groups, not difficult to arrange as there are five blank half pages in the appropriate chapter. I found the term 'alien tissue lesion' inappropriate. The lesions described under this heading are ones which most pathologists would term hamartomatous; they comprised glia, neurones, and blood vessels, all structures which one would expect to find in the cerebral cortex. Clinical details were brief and I think that most paediatricians would want to know more about outcome than frequency of fits and merely a comparison with preoperative state under the heading 'personality and social adjustment'.

Although the onset of symptoms in two thirds of cases was during infancy or childhood, the subjects of this book are a small carefully selected group of patients, quite unrepresentative of children in whom a diagnosis of epilepsy is made. For this reason I cannot recommend this book for purchase by individual paediatricians despite its modest price. I even hesitate to recommend it for the bookshelf of the paediatric neurologist but would, rather, draw it to his attention and suggest that he persuades his neurology or neuropathology department to buy it so that he may consult it from time to time.

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In view of the fact that if you claim any interest at all in epilepsy you will undoubtedly already have ready access to one of the first two editions of A Textbook of Epilepsy, you may ask why you, or your library, should spend £60 on the new one. The answer is that it has been very extensively rewritten and updated. When this book first appeared in 1976 there were three contributors. For the second edition in 1982 there were 37 and now there are 239. Twenty two of the contributors to the second edition have now bowed out and there are 15 new names. Only seven of the contributors to the first edition have survived to the third. In bringing out a new edition every six years and making sweeping changes in the authors, the editors obviously intend to keep the textbook alive and on its toes. Dr Oxley has joined the original editors with the intention of 'supervising further editions well into the 21st century'.

The chapter on childhood epilepsy, which in the second edition had three authors, has now been written entirely by Sheila Wallace. Her chapter is a scholarly discourse strong on description of seizure types and on neurobiology and pathology and pathophysiology and perhaps less strong on a clinical approach to the problems of children with epilepsy and their non-medical management. As might be expected, the chapter contains a comprehensive account of febrile convulsions, though the simplistic definition of a febrile convolution as 'any seizure occurring in association with any febrile illness' seems to me unworkable without further qualifications. The chapter ends with a list of over 250