Book reviews

Recent Advances in Neuropathology. No. 1. Edited by W. Thomas Smith and J. B. Cavanagh. (Pp. viii + 325; illustrated; £19.00.) London: Churchill Livingstone. 1979.

Although large reference textbooks on pathology are essential, they are usually rather inflexible and often out of date by the time they are published. Smaller books like the Recent Advances series are therefore invaluable for updating a subject and for dealing with areas not covered by standard reference texts; this promise is fulfilled in the present volume on neuropathology. The first part of the book covers the important field of cerebral oedema, regeneration in the central nervous system, ageing, and neuroectodermal tumours. Each subject has an experimental or methodological section followed by a chapter more directly applicable to human pathology. In the rest of the book, various subjects of topical interest in neuropathology and clinical neurology are covered. These include a chapter on spina bifida, metallic neurotoxicity, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinsonism. All the sections are well written and some are even controversial; this is a book that not only imparts factual information but also impels the reader to think about the subjects. I hope that the impetus and high standards of this first volume of *Recent Advances in Neuropathology* will be maintained throughout the series.

R. O. WELLER

Perspectives in Pediatric Pathology. Volume 4. Edited by Harvey S. Rosenberg and Robert P. Bolande. (Pp. vii + 515; illustrated; £24.50.) Chicago and London: Year Book Medical Publishers Inc. 1978.

A list of the contents of volume 4 of *Perspectives in Pediatric Pathology* is a useful if dull approach to this review. However it happens to reflect my feelings about reading the book. The contents cover: Information systems of the body, current concepts and speculation, with emphasis on genetic metabolic diseases; Perinatal brain damage; Cystic and congenital lung disease in the newborn; Atherosclerosis in childhood; Hepatic

tumours in the pediatric age group; The fibromatoses of infancy and childhood; Muscle disorders in the floppy child; An atlas of viral particles from human specimens; Membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis; The haemolytic uremic syndrome of childhood.

Each chapter, bristling with references, provides an illustrated review of the subject but it is the encyclopaedic style of these yearbooks that makes reading them unenjoyable. 'Muscle disorders in the floppy child' is the only chapter with a British origin. It is the shortest. Is this a reflection on the value of the 'Queen's English' and thus perhaps the sole disadvantage of the precipitate action of the Americans on 4 July 1776? Abbreviations abound in most chapters, reaching a climax in 'Congenital and cystic disease of the lung'. The cast list here includes CCAM, ILE, IPE, ELS, BPFM, RDS, CPAP, AIPE, ILS, CAL, the team of PIPE and PEEP along with an old friend PAS. It is a surprise not to find NUPE or ASTMS, frequent causes of sudden apnoeic attacks among pathologists.

The series, now up to four volumes, is accumulating a wide range of articles on paediatric problems. This volume is a good starting point for anyone wanting a rapid 'overview' of its selected topics.

ASHLEY PRICE

Logic and Economics of Clinical Laboratory Use. Edited by E. S. Benson and M. Ruben. (Pp. xiv + 273; illustrated; £37.50.) New York. 1978.

This book reports the Proceedings of the Conference on the Logic and Economics of the Clinical Laboratory Test Selection and Use held in Cancun, Mexico, 4-9 March 1978.

In their preface the editors link the increase in costs of health-care (and associated clinical laboratory costs) with '.....an alienation, a lack of "good-fit" between what the laboratory has to offer and what medicine can readily and effectively use'. Despite the title of the conference discussion seems to have been limited essentially to clinical chemistry laboratories though the lessons to be learned no doubt apply to other disciplines. The conference avoided the tedious

but important subjects of the proper utilisation of skilled labour and the selection of analytical machinery. The topics were considered under the headings of Economics of Laboratory Utilisation, Test Selection and Decision Analysis, Reference Values and other Background Data, Interpretation of Data, and Effective Utilisation of the Clinical Laboratory.

The main thrust of the conference lay in cutting costs by diminishing waste. Reduction of redundant testing could be achieved by more effective clinical decision-making. The contributors suggest that improvements in the categorisation of patients can be obtained by the use of more precise reference ('normal') ranges and by the better selection of tests and their interpretation in terms of probability.

In the discussion of the use of the laboratory much stress is laid on improving the education of the medical student and the young clinician so that he uses the laboratory with care and thought. To achieve this those of us working in laboratories must have greater insight into the relevance and use of the data we produce by collaborating and communicating more effectively with our clinical colleagues.

Practising clinical pathologists will find this a thought-provoking book even though they may find difficulty in travelling along the suggested paths in their own laboratories.

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