Foundations of Thoracic Surgery


This stimulating book by Mr. Ronald Edwards is a collection of expanded lectures and demonstrations on thoracic surgery, and represents the current practice in the Liverpool Cardio-Thoracic Centre. It is written in note form making extensive use of excellent diagrams. Many well reproduced radiographs are shown and together with the diagrams of the subject concerned are so arranged as to be in immediate relationship to the text. Any remarks concerning details of this book are more in the nature of differences of opinion rather than of criticism.

It is reasonable to prefer the steep head down position to the use of endobronchial cuffs or balloons when performing lobectomy for bronchectasis, (p. 48) but for children the sitting position may be even safer in preventing a spill over, transfusion maintaining the blood pressure in this position. No mention is made of peristitis occurring in several adjacent ribs in the early stages of a pleuro-pulmonary infection as being the only radiographic appearance diagnostic of thoracic actinomycosis (p. 51).

Tracheal cylindroma (p. 59) may present as several tumours of multicentric origin when radiotherapy gives better results than excision.

When a tracheostomy tube needs changing (p. 82) it makes it much easier for the nursing staff if a Bjork type of tracheostomy has been performed.

The sections on congenital and acquired heart disease are particularly good and the diagrams most informative. In discussing the surgical treatment of aortic stenosis (p. 125) it is very doubtful if blind aortic valvotomy is now ever indicated, except where aortic and mitral stenosis co-exist, when blind valvotomy on both valves must be performed at the same operation.

When describing cardiac massage through the open chest (p. 142) emphasis should be placed on the correct method of performing this for the benefit of the uninitiated who may be tempted to squeeze the ventricles between thumb and fingers, with the resulting danger of ventricular perforation. In children the heart should be compressed between the flattened fingers and the back of the sternum, and in adults between the flat of two hands.

While stressing the excellent results obtained with Heller's operation for the treatment of achalasia of the cardia (p. 157) bouginage and hydrostatic bag treatment are also mentioned, but should at the same time have been condemned as perforation may result from their use.

It is stated that an E.C.G. should be taken to differentiate between the pain of coronary ischaemia and hiatus hernia, but the patterns unfortunately may be identical, and after repair of a hiatus hernia, an "ischaemic" E.C.G. pattern can quickly return to normal.

This book cannot be too highly praised and should be read by all housemen and registrars on Thoracic Surgical Units and by all who are reading for higher surgical qualifications.

Neurogenic Hypertension


In the introduction, the author proposes the hypothesis that resistance to the blood flow through the brain, especially the medulla, is an important long-term influence upon the systemic arterial pressure. The book consists of a critical analysis of this hypothesis, and is, therefore, "virtually a scientific autobiography, and those who dislike autobiographies will dislike this one."

The book is in three sections. The first part describes the development of the hypothesis, and its materialism over a number of years; in the second part the hypothesis is tested and all the supporting evidence reviewed in great detail and critically evaluated. On this theory, Essential Hypertension is the result of failure to compensate for increased cerebrovascular resistance, due largely to atheroma involving the posterior cerebral artery, or along the hind-brain. Similarly, renal hypertension could show the same vascular cause. Obviously the atheroma could equally be the result, rather the cause, of the raised pressure.

The final section of the book is an extension of the hypothesis and its practical applications, including the novel suggestion that angiography of the vessels of the hind-brain be used to determine whether or not a patient has essential hypertension, as distinct from renal or adrenal causes.

It is obviously easy to be sceptical or any work proposing a new hypothesis of disease. This book is the outcome of immense thought and work, is beautifully written, full of excitement and stimulation and recommended to all interested in the problem of raised blood pressure.

The Small Intestine


In June, 1964 a symposium on the small intestine was held during the meeting of the International Academy of Pathology in London. This slim paperback contains the papers given at the symposium by a formidable gathering of authors. One's initial emotion is one of regret — at not being there. This book titilates but does not satisfy — illustration, other than line graphs and line drawings, are absent; this lack is particularly crippling in the articles dealing with electron microscopy and mucosal appearances of the small intestine, and with the radiological approach to diagnosis. Moreover, three contributions are not accompanied by references.

Nevertheless the symposium, and this book are successful. Fourteen chapters include accounts of the deformities of the intestine, histo-chemistry of the jejunum; mucosal and radiological features of various intestinal diseases, and excellent contributions on the intestinal aspects of shock. Whipple's disease, Crohn's disease and carcinoid tumours are reviewed.

The booklet will provide those who attended the conference with a permanent record of its activities — the rest of us can only regret that a complete monograph on the structure and function of the small intestine is still to be written.

Nervous Control of the Heart


The advent of B-adrenergic blocking drugs for clinical use has greatly stimulated interest in the nervous control of the heart. This wonderful book is based on a symposium in which several leading investigators and teams in the United States presented their work, ideas and hypotheses.

As might have been expected from the sophistication of present day haemodynamic techniques, the largest section of the book is that of Sarnoff and associates.