Reviews

MYOTONIA

Myotonia. Thomsen's Disease (Myotonia Congenita), Paramyotonia, and Dystrophia Myotonica. A Clinical and Heredobiologic Investigation. By Eivind Thomasen. Translated from the Dutch by Finn Brink Carlsen. (Pp. 251; 17 figures. £1.) Denmark: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus. London: H. K. Lewis and Co. 1948.

Myotonia is defined as a peculiar functional disturbance of striated musculature characterized by an abnormal protracted muscle contraction. It is accompanied by a typical electrical phenomenon whereby muscular contraction continues for several seconds and then subsides gradually. Myotonia is a characteristic manifestation of the hereditary disorders myotonia congenita (Thomsen's disease), paramyotonia (Eulenburg's disease), and dystrophia myotonica (myotonia atrophica). These disorders, though admittedly rare, are among the most interesting of neurological affections. Dr. Thomasen's monograph is a valuable contribution to the literature of this subject, for it affords the English-speaking reader a detailed account of the clinical manifestations. The author was fortunate in the richness of his personal experience of these affections. Thus, his cases of dystrophia myotonica are drawn from 21 Danish families with 874 living members, among whom there were 101 assured cases of the disease. In the case of Thomsen's disease the author surveyed five families, comprising 465 living members, of whom 29 were afflicted with the disorder. Dr. Thomasen also draws attention to the syndromes described by Hoffmann and by Debré and Semelaigne in which muscle hypertrophy and myotonoid features are associated with myxoedema. The author is particularly interesting when discussing Maas and Paterson's views on the identity of Thomsen's disease and dystrophia myotonica. He discusses the arguments in some detail, but comes to the conclusion that the two disorders are distinct affections.

MACDONALD CRITCHLEY.

PRACTICAL OBSTETRICS

A Manual of Practical Obstetrics. By O'Donel Browne, M.D., M.A.O., M.A., Litt.D., F.R.C.P.I., F.R.C.O.G. 2nd edition. 1948. (Pp. 267; illustrated. 35s.) Bristol: John Wright and Sons, Ltd.

In this book Professor O'Donel Browne has set himself an extremely difficult task in attempting to cover the management and treatment of all obstetrical conditions, normal and abnormal, within the limit of 250 pages. Even when theoretical considerations are omitted as far as possible, the field is large and much of it must of necessity receive a thin and unsatisfactory covering. In a work of this size it is perhaps a better policy to deal adequately with a few common obstetrical problems. This book has, of course, many good features, and among these may be mentioned the clear and well-illustrated accounts of the technical details of obstetric manœuvres. In many respects, however, it invites adverse comment, despite criticism being forestalled to some extent by the author's pointing out that the book presents unqualified personal opinions and that it should be read in conjunction with the more standard textbooks rather than in place of them if the reader is to obtain a proper perspective.

Twelve years have elapsed since the first edition was published, and this period has seen great changes in outlook and practice in midwifery. To bring the book thoroughly up to date would therefore have necessitated rewriting it almost completely. As it is, it gives the impression that the revision has been patchy, and the effect is a rather curious mixture of ancient and modern. To take two examples only: penicillin is used for puerperal sepsis but not for acute mastitis; the modern classification of pelvic shapes is included, but the treatment of thrombophlebitis is the same as practised twenty years ago, and there is no mention of anticoagulant drugs. The absence of any attempt to indicate the relative importance of different conditions is also noticeable.

It may be that the author has often deliberately described treatment which is not ideal, having in mind those of his readers who will be called to practise under circumstances far from perfect in some of the remoter parts of Eire. Indeed, the book is primarily intended for Professor O'Donel Browne's own students and to supplement his personal instruction to them. It may serve this purpose well, but the general reader will find it less helpful.

T. N. A. JEFFCOATE.

ECLAMPSIA

Eclampsie et Eclampsisme. By Henri Vignes. (Pp. 220. 450 francs.) Paris: Masson et Cie. 1948.

By this new publication Henri Vignes has increased his already great reputation. He has compressed into some 200 pages most of what has been written or recorded about eclampsia. Indeed, one cannot recall any comparable work on the subject, and it is hoped that it will be translated into English. The book is a typical French publication, with little effort to produce a table of contents and with none of the precise classification usually provided by German writers. Its success depends essentially upon clarity of expression and the wide knowledge of the author. References are ingeniously incorporated in the text, with references to the important papers placed at the bottom of each page. No publication of importance seems to have escaped notice, and proper stress is placed upon work done in Great Britain, though (on page 70) F. J. Browne is referred to as "Browe." The author stresses no particular theories and no particular therapies. His attitude is one of an impartial judicious summing-up. The volume merits the highest praise.

WILFRED SHAW.

VITAMIN DEFICIENCY SYNDROME

A Neuro-Vascular Syndrome Related to Vitamin Deficiency. By Hendrik Smitskamp. (Pp. 114. No price given.) Amsterdam: Scheltema and Holkema's Boekhandel.

During the recent war a group of Dutch medical men made a study of the malnutritional syndromes which were met with among the inmates of a Japanese P.O.W. camp at Bandoeng, Java. This group included Dr. O. L. E. De Raadt, otoneurologist, Dr. J. Schwartz, ophthalmologist, the late Dr. Buitelaar, neurologist, who did not survive the hardships of war, Dr. Van der Hoeven, neurologist, and Dr. H. Smitskamp, general physician. One section of their observations has already been published and reviewed—an M.D. thesis (Leiden, 1947) entitled "Pellagra in the Oto-neurology and Rhino-laryngology," by De Raadt. This book is also an M.D. thesis, and the author discusses the condition commonly known as "burning feet."

In Part 1 successive chapters are on the clinical manifestations, the results obtained by means of capillaroscopy, laboratory findings, and therapy; in Part 2 on history, current literature, aetiology, pathogenesis, the differential diagnosis from erythromelalgia, acrodynia, and acroparaesthesia. In 1943 some 700 patients were seen at a clinic set up for malnutritional disease; from these 347 were selected and formed the subject for study. The observations made by Dr. Smitskamp do not differ materially from those made by our own medical men in other P.O.W. camps in the Far East, but they form a very interesting and detailed complementary contribution to the subject. He noted that optic neuropathy occurred in 42.8% of the cases of "burning feet," and in 27.8% of those with "otoneurological aberration." "Epithelial lesions" (cheilosis, scrotal dermatitis) were very common, but occurred also among those not suffering from the syndrome—31% and 25% respectively. He remarks on the close association of the syndrome with signs of hypovitaminosis to the exclusion of beriberi and pellagra.

This paper will interest those who are familiar with the literature of the deficiency syndromes.

HUGH S. STANNUS.

A POPULAR SIGNPOST

Anaesthetics and the Patient. By Gordon Ostlere, M.A., M.B., B.Chir., D.A. Sigma Introduction to Science 15. (Pp. 166. 7s. 6d.) London: Sigma Books. 1949.

This is one of the "Introductions to Science" series, and fills a real need in being addressed to that large section of the intelligent lay public which is repelled by the sentimentality

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