Book Reviews


This book is based upon the author's personal experience of 241 patients with spinal cord damage, and also upon his wide knowledge of the literature on the subject. The book covers diagnosis, treatment, complications and rehabilitation of cord injuries.

The author is a firm advocate of active operative intervention in all cases of cord damage except where the cord is considered to be transected or irreparably damaged, and in the chapter on treatment he attempts to justify this attitude. I do not think he succeeds. He does not produce any clear evidence that laminectomy, opening of the dura, chordotomy or division of the dentate ligaments has the slightest favourable effect upon the prognosis.

The section on diagnosis and treatment of the vertebral lesion is most disappointing. The diagnosis of the various types of vertebral injury are not discussed at all, and although the author considers reduction of the dislocation or fracture-dislocation and stabilisation of the spine to be important, no clear indication as to how these objectives are to be achieved emerges from a long and involved discussion.

As a review of the widely differing opinions held by many authorities on the diagnosis and treatment of this serious lesion this book might be recommended, but as a clear and helpful guide to those faced with the problems it cannot be said to succeed.—Frank Holdsworth.


Every speciality tends to feel neglected and orthopaedics is no exception. Certainly in undergraduate teaching it is often regarded as the poor relation of general surgery. Justification is sought in the hoary cliché that the student must first learn basic principles. Maybe—but what principle in general surgery teaches him how to examine a joint? If he were taught only orthopaedic methods would he acquire the art of abdominal diagnosis?

Clinical neglect was formerly reflected in the dearth of good orthopaedic undergraduate textbooks. This situation has been improving in recent years and Mr Crabbe's new book marks a further step forwards. A curious feature is the absence of clinical photographs or radiographs, but there is a host of diagrams which, for the beginner, may be better. Most of the drawings are clear and illuminating; some, inevitably, are not. For example, few students could base a confident diagnosis on the drawings of congenital foot deformities; and one can only surmise what the late Sir Denis Browne might have said on seeing the illustration of his splint for talipes. A more serious criticism concerns the description of clinical examination, an art often sadly lacking, not only in undergraduates but even in Fellowship candidates. Although some regions such as the hip and knee are well described, others, and especially the foot, are hardly discussed.

On the whole this is an excellent book and certainly one of the best in its field. The coverage (in little more than 300 pages) is adequate, the text clear and concise, the index comprehensive and the biographical notes stimulating. The choice of topics and the techniques advocated indicate that the author is shrewdly aware of the requirements of his readers both as examination candidates and as future doctors. He is to be congratulated on a book which is likely to become a standard undergraduate work.—A. G. Apley.