

Book Reviews

SYNCOPE, Volume 18 in the series. 1988. By R.T. Ross. Published by W.B. Saunders Company, 160 pages. \$86.25.

"Blackouts" are one of the commonest reasons for neurological consultation, and it is curious that monographs on syncope are not more plentiful. Dr. Ross, the founder editor of the Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences, has written a masterly treatise which needs no alternatives. It is modest in size (only 160 pages), concise, informative and well-written by one of Canada's most prestigious neurologists. It covers everything from vaso-vagal attacks, to esophageal syncope and for those always in search of eponymous disorders, the Jervell-Lange-Nielson syndrome.

There is a whole generation of medical students who have read syncope in Harrison's Textbook of Medicine, and who erroneously believe that syncope includes seizures and hypoglycemia, so it was reassuring to see a clear definition in the opening lines of the book.

The index could be more comprehensive, and in future editions should be considerably expanded. Also, the chapter summaries, displayed as tables, would be more appropriate at the end of each chapter instead of somewhat inappropriately buried in the later paragraphs. Also, the price is high considering the size of the book.

The author has studied the subject in considerable depth, and makes many interesting points even on the basic principles. For instance, how many readers will know that vaso-vagal syncope is primarily a vasomotor and not a vagal (i.e., central) phenomenon? He also makes a case for cardiological investigation of patients with seizures and normal EEGs.

This book is interesting and easy reading, and contains basic and clinical material which is relevant to cardiologists and internists just as much as neurologists. It is mandatory reading for anyone interested in the topic.

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DISORDERS OF THE DEVELOPING NERVOUS SYSTEM. CHANGING VIEWS ON THEIR ORIGINS, DIAGNOSES, AND TREATMENTS. 1989. Edited by J.W. Swann and A. Messer. Published by Alan R. Liss, Inc. 277 pages. \$50 Cdn. approx.

This volume is the proceedings of the XVIII Albany Birth Defects Symposium held in Albany, USA, September 28-29, 1987. It is a hodgepodge of mostly unrelated and disjointed topics without a theme to unite them. Even the title is not broad enough to encompass all chapters. A contribution by Peter Ray of Toronto on gene mapping in Duchenne muscular dystrophy is completely isolated, though more informative than some other chapters. Some chapters are clinically oriented, such as "Antecedents of cerebral palsy and childhood seizure disorders" by Karin Nelson; others deal with animal research, such as "Disorders of the developing nervous system of the trisomy-16

mouse"; others deal with techniques, such as "PET scanning in normal and abnormal brain development"; still others treat embryological topics, such as "The role of timing and cell interactions in cerebellar development". Relationships are postulated or associated with such a wide variety of human neurological diseases as Alzheimer's disease, infantile autism, phenylketonuria, lipid storage disorders of the nervous system, and Down syndrome.

This book is almost a caricature of the worst aspects of the publication of symposium proceedings in general. It is not that the chapters, read individually in isolation, are not reasonable reviews by experienced and knowledgeable authors, but the attempt to tie them together in a theme is contrived and predestined to failure. The book cannot be a resource material precisely because it lacks a unifying theme. It is a potpourri, and each chapter would have had more impact had it been published as a separate review article in an appropriate journal.

Photocopy rather than typesetting of text further contributes to the air of hurried and poor planning. The few photographs and illustrations are reproduced satisfactorily, however, as glossy plates. The price is high. I think this volume will be soon forgotten and rarely cited. It is unfortunate that the authors put so much work into preparing the individual chapters that deserve to but will not be read.

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PARKINSONISM AND AGING, Volume 36. 1989. Edited by D.B. Calne, G. Comi, D. Crippa, R. Horowski and M. Tabucchi. Published by Raven Press. 311 pages. \$84 Cdn. approx.

This is a multi-authored volume based on a symposium held in Milan in November 1987, supported by Schering, A.G. In it, there are 27 separate papers on a wide variety of related and unrelated topics with the principal link being Parkinson's disease, with aging being a less consistent common thread. Many of the latest hypotheses regarding etiology, pathophysiology, and natural history are considered. Latest developments in neuro-imaging and the changes found in Parkinson's disease and other parkinsonian disorders are evaluated. Therapeutics are also considered with an emphasis on the dopamine agonist lisuride.

The quality of the papers presented also varies considerably. The introductory paper by Birkmayer and Birkmayer is of some historical interest in view of the considerable contributions of the senior author to the field. However, the concepts presented here are somewhat confusing and the "5-stage process" of therapeutics is a bit too self-serving. As is often the case in such volumes, much of the material presented has been published in other forums. However, this volume does contain some new, interesting data and some excellent reviews of how technological advances are being applied to the investigation of the problems of aging and neurodegenerative diseases. In the first category, it is worth mentioning the discussion of Hornykiewicz and