suit. Some colleagues considered this self-inspired change over as arrogant and insensitive to the interests of his co-workers. But it worked. His subsequent research led to major new concepts, most importantly acquired immunological tolerance and clonal selection, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1960 along with Peter Medawar. But following retirement some five years later, he began to see himself as a biological generalist, propounding ideas which often attracted considerable oppro- brium from the scientific community, as for example in his book Endurance for Life, published in 1978, where he addressed issues as diverse as ageing, the value of human life, aggressive power, good and evil, and the future of man! He espoused infanticide for serious untreatable conditions and euthanasia. Why is it that the great and famous in their waning years often feel the need to pontificate in this way? In Burnet’s case it may well have detracted somewhat from appreciation of the very major contributions he made to science in his halcyon days.

This is one of the most interesting and beautifully written biographies I have ever read. It is peppered throughout with quotations from Burnet’s correspondence, writings, and discussions with the author. It is well documented and informative. It is also very good to read.

ALAN EMBRY


The authors have selected topics on developmental neurology which were presented at the Joint Convention of the 5th International Child Neurology Congress and the 3rd Asian and Oceanic Congress of Child Neurology, held in Tokyo at the end of 1990. The articles fall into several groups. Firstly, there are reviews of the development of the brain in its biochemical and anatomical aspects. Then there are descriptions of several paediatric syndromes, most of which are genetically determined. Thirdly, there is a group of papers discussing the mechanism of intrauterine growth retardation and the significance of pre-and perinatal events, and finally a group of papers discusses ethical problems in child neurology.

Some of these articles are particularly commendable. M V Johnston provides an exciting review of the role that neurotransmitters (particularly glutamate and its receptors) play in the normal development of the brain, and in protecting it from biochemical insults such as hyperbilirubinemia and hyperglycaemia. Y Suzuki describes the analysis of β-galactosidase deficiency as an example of reverse genetics. Eleven different mutations have been found in its gene, including deletions and single base substitutions. It is interesting that patients with late onset Gp13 gangliosidosis are mainly homozygotes for a single, common mutation. A critical account of the peripheral neuropathies is given by R A Ouvrier who emphasises the clinical features of type III with its facial involvement (pouting lips and coarse facial features) and autosomal recessive inheritance. He also gives a useful description of the severe early onset neuronal type of peripheral neuropathy but in this the genetic pattern is unclear. B Hagberg et al describe a new condition which they term the carbohydrate deficient glycoprotein (CDG) syndrome. This may present in infancy, childhood, or adult life and is characterised by ataxia, mental retardation, and a deficiency of serum glyco- proteins, particularly of transferrin. There are also useful reviews concerning the treatment of metabolic disorders of childhood, the neurocutaneous disorders, the peroxisomal diseases, and AIDS affecting the central nervous system of children. However, some of the reviews are too descriptive and ignore clues to pathogenesis. For example, there is no mention of chromosome abnormalities in some autistic patients.

The section on ethical problems in child neurology discusses practices in different countries and cultures concerning the determination of brain death, and the allocation of scarce medical resources. Dr I C Verma from India provides a thoughtful review of the ethical implications of health care in developing countries, in which he emphasises the high infant mortality rate, the financial and emotional burden of having a neurologically handicapped child, the expense of major corrective surgery, and the different parental responses towards the ill health of sons compared to daughters.

I have one major criticism of this book, namely that it is far too expensive. For £130 it is possible to buy a major textbook in medicine or endocrinology or medical genetics. These conference proceedings should certainly have been produced in paperback.

SARAH BUNDEY

NOTICE

Molecular Basis of Ion Channels and Receptors Involved in Nerve Excitation, Synaptic Transmission and Muscle Contraction

This symposium, sponsored by The New York Academy of Sciences, will be held on 12 to 15 January 1993 at The Ibuca Memorial Hall, Waseda University, Japan. For further information contact: Conference Department, The New York Academy of Sciences, 2 East 63rd Street, New York, NY 10021, USA. Tel: (212) 838-0230. Fax: (212) 888 2894.