variety syndromes in which mental deficiency figures is considered by G. Koch. Koch also contributes a full section on the epilepsies, and this covers the genetic findings in electroencephalography, and there are also clinical and pathological studies on laboratory animals. A shorter section on neuropsychopathies contributed by E. Strömberg is sufficiently up to date to include the reports on the XXY anomaly in criminal offenders. E. Zerbin-Rüdin, who contributed the section on idiopathic mental deficiency, is also responsible for the sections on atrophies of the brain and on endogenous psychoses: the genetic aspects in these difficult spheres are discussed critically.

As in the earlier volumes of this Handbook, the production is worthy of the contributors’ and the editor’s outstanding efforts.

Arnold Sorsby


Dr. Pratt’s book fills a gap in English medical literature. Over the past century, clinicians have provided a rich but chaotic account of heredodegenerative and familial disorders affecting the nervous system, and a treatise was badly needed that would provide both a systematic account and a critical discussion of relevant world literature. Here we have both.

This monograph is essentially a catalogue of most of the known genetically determined disorders as they affect the central nervous system, but inevitably a measure of selection has been applied—thus a discussion of muscular dystrophies is included because it comes within the purview of the neurologist, but inborn metabolic errors, such as Hartnup’s disease, are dealt with very briefly because of their absorbing interest to workers in other disciplines and because they are dealt with adequately elsewhere. And yet perhaps these metabolic disorders are a paradigm for our understanding of most of the conditions described here, since they are probably also biochemically determined.

Dr. Pratt deals with his subject from the standpoint of the clinician and not from that of the biochemist, but in doing so is somewhat unreserved in his acceptance of the clinical assertions of others. Of course, this is inevitable in reviewing ancient descriptions of obscure disorders (and in contemporary medicine, ‘ancient’ means anything more than 15 years old, the subject matter of at least one-third of the contents of the bibliography).

Most of the clinical descriptions are deliberately brief, yet for an intelligent understanding of what is written here, a clinical appraisal is essential, and actual first-hand experience very desirable. The reader is not spared the need to read original articles but this is facilitated by a comprehensive bibliography of over 2800 references. This synoptic approach is wholly justifiable otherwise the treatise would have been very lengthy and perhaps turgid.

I have no major disagreement to cite. In the discussion of epilepsy, it is a pity that the more recent studies of Ounsted and his colleagues (Clinics in Developmental Medicine, No. 22, 1966) relating temporal lobe epilepsy in childhood to febrile convulsions are not mentioned, because they may prove to be important, not only from the therapeutic standpoint, but also in genetic counselling in this disease which is still bemused by old wives’ tales. It is a pity, too, that, particularly in the so-called abiotrophic disorders, there is no discussion of the age-specific data available for estimating the risk to siblings, but it must be recognized that often there is an abysmal lack of reliable information for such computations, anyway.

Inevitably there are difficulties over classification and nomenclature, arising out of the differing interpretation of others’ findings. It is becoming abundantly clear that the traditional clinical and even neuropathological features are not sufficiently discriminatory to provide any fundamental differentiation. Yet these parameters have provided the material for wearingly uncritical discussion for over half a century, and of course Dr. Pratt has been obliged (for the time being) to work within this very limited framework. One hopes that biochemical advances in the next two or three decades will be such that, in future classifications of hereditary neurological disorders, we will have the advantage of a more basic understanding of the various disease processes, and that this monograph will thus be eclipsed (but not redundant). The duration of its pre-eminence will be a useful measure of the rate of progress in neurology. In the meantime, diseases that are genetically determined, directly or indirectly, form such a large and often unsuspected part of neurological practice, that all neurologists should possess this book—I assume that clinical geneticists will have it already.

John Wilson


McKusick’s little volume is an excellent introduction to human genetics in general. Two introductory chapters deal with the basic aspects of chromosomes and genes in inheritance. Of the remaining chapters two deal with the gene in individuals—bringing in oral matters as protein structure and enzyme deficiencies—and genes in differentiation and development. Two further chapters deal with the gene in families and in populations; the necessary elementary mathematics being most adequately covered. The three concluding chapters deal with genetics in relation to evolution, medicine, and society. Both the arrangement of the text and the presentation of the matter are imaginative and attractive.