Book reviews

The genesis of contemporary American anesthesiology

P.O. Volpito and L.D. Vandam (Editors), Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, Publishers, 1982, \$29.75 us

The development of American anaesthesia in the 1930's and 1940's is examined in this collection of 16 essays. The preface notes that the initial plan for this volume included material from Western Europe and Canada, but that subsequently it was found necessary to limit the scope to the United States.

The role of the "visionaries" is examined in the first section of chapters describing the contributions of McMechan, McKesson, Guedel, Lundy and Waters. The second section is devoted to the "activators" – Roventine, Tovell, Beecher, Cullen, Adriani, Dripps, Papper and Volpito. The final section is titled "The Matrix" and reviews the history of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, the American Board of Anesthesiology and the origins and development of the journal *Anesthesiology*.

Although a number of the individual chapters suffer from having been written many years ago and not having been fully updated, the essays are in general very pleasant reading and clearly outline the major contributions made by the individual leaders of American anesthesiology.

Anyone with an interest in the history of anaesthesia in the United States or in the contributions of any of the individuals included in this review, will find this review most enjoyable.

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Management of Labor

W.R. Cohen and E.A. Friedman (Editors), University Park Press, Baltimore, 1983, \$34.50 us

This book is a collection of essays on complicated labour and delivery. The major areas covered

include: 1. Assessment and management of disorders in progress of labour, 2. Diagnosis and complications of intrapartum asphyxia, 3. Obstetric anaesthesia and newborn resuscitation, 4. Specific reviews on premature labour, breech presentation, Caesarean section and twin gestation, 5. Childbirth alternatives and communication with patients.

The sections on obstetric anaesthesia and newborn resuscitation contain basic materials already familiar to most anaesthetists. The authors have concentrated on selected aspects at the expense of a complete coverage (e.g., complications of epidural anaesthesia were limited to massive sub-arachnoid injection, massive subdural injection, convulsion and cardiovascular collapse). Although many chapters include brief physiologic discussion, practical obstetric applications are emphasized.

While the book is well written, its contents and orientation are designed mainly for obstetricians. I would recommend this book only to those interested in obstetric approaches to complicated labour and delivery.

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The gift of surgery to mankind: A history of modern anesthesiology

Richard B. Knapp MD, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1983, \$21.75 us

This small volume sets out to trace the enormous changes which have taken place in anaesthesia since the introduction of the muscle relaxants in 1942. Related topics are grouped together in chronological order in each chapter with summaries and quotations from some of the more important papers and reviews. While the majority of the advances are at least mentioned, there are several obvious omissions, and other subjects are dealt with so briefly as to make their inclusion of doubtful value. Perhaps this is inevitable in a book of this size, but for example one general paragraph summarizing an

early review of induced hypotension, without any reference to agents, hardly justifies "induced hypotensive techniques" as part of a chapter heading.

A more fundamental fault throughout the book, however, is the lack of commentary by the author linking the individual summaries and relating new developments to changing patterns of practice. A history cannot be a mere presentation of a chronology of events. In a medical context to come alive it must explain how these events have influenced our understanding of drugs and techniques, and consequently altered our practices. Lacking such explanation the text becomes at times a somewhat tedious catalogue, and fails to illustrate the lessons which can be learned for the future from our progress in the past 40 years.

Dr. Knapp's statement in the opening preface, that "I look back on my career of only 22 years in the field and have been absolutely amazed at the changes occurring with what seems like lightning speed in our profession," is one that can be read with empathy by most of us who have worked in this era. Unfortunately in my view the book fails to live up to the promise of that statement, and may fail to hold the interest of those who will help to make the history of anaesthesia during the next 40 years.

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Handbook of Emergency Anaesthesia

Anne J. Sutcliffe, Butterworths, 1983. 256 pages.
Price \$24.50 US

This new book adds to the increasing number of books of lists intended for junior residents as a portable quick reference. It is not intended to replace standard teaching or reference sources. The author has confined the topics to adult anaesthesia. The book is intended to be "brief and dogmatic" and not intended to preclude other safe methods for the same results.

The contents review preoperative preparation, monitoring, anaesthetic techniques, intra- and post-operative problems. In addition, there is a list of some specific medical conditions and some of their implications for anaesthesia. Four appendices include some drug interactions, skin preparatory

solutions, drug infusion recipes and the use of vasoactive drugs.

The title of the book implies that its contents apply specifically to emergency anaesthesia. In fact, the book is a cursory review of the principles of anaesthesia in general, with very little information specific to emergency procedures. It is a book of lists and as such, is not always complete. Furthermore, because no theoretical basis for the contents of the lists is offered, many of the management suggestions are mysterious in their derivation. The book itself represents the personal view point of one individual, which in some areas (e.g., rapid sequence induction) appears to conflict with the prevailing consensus in more standard references. Finally, this book assumes that the junior resident will be alone in difficult situations, hopefully not the North American training standard. The last management suggestion in several areas of the book is to call the consultant or senior anaesthetist for advice if all else fails.

In summary, this book has little to offer. It has no advantages over other standard portable reference books and it is expensive.

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James Robinson on the inhalation of the vapour of ether

Richard H. Ellis, Baillière Tindall, 1 St. Anne's Road, Eastbourne BN21 3UN, England, 1983
£9.50

This is a facsimile reproduction of the first, and little known textbook, on anaesthesia. In the preface Dr. Ellis, an authority on the very early days of ether anaesthesia, tells us that the original volume was listed in The Publishers' Circular of March 1, 1847 (only ten weeks after ether was first used in Britain) and therefore antedates John Snow's first book by seven months. He then gives us interesting information on Robinson, a dentist of high professional standing and integrity who soon became a leading anaesthetist. He suggests why it was that Robinson rather than the surgeon Robert Liston, or indeed an American, who wrote the first book on anaesthesia.

The book itself opens with a letter and paper from

Dr. Bigelow in Boston to Dr. Boott (a friend of Robinson's) in London plus letters from Boott and Liston to The Lancet describing their successful use of ether. Next comes a section describing Robinson's own experience, often with verbatim quotations of his patients during emergence of very light anaesthesia. He goes on to describe eye signs of anaesthesia which would correspond roughly to Guedel's Stages I and II. Many important people were invited to witness the effect of the wonderful drug, not only doctors but members of parliament and even a nephew of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. The final section contains reports of the use of ether in hospitals in several parts of England and even from Banff in the north east of Scotland. This is a book which helps us to appreciate what the discovery of anaesthesia meant to doctors and patients and to relive with them those exciting early days.

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