Preface

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The tasks of teachers coincide with the needs of students. The student needs initiation, instruction, inspiration, orientation, perspective, guidance, encouragement and, above all, truth. These the ideal teacher gladly provides but at immense cost in time, thought and effort. In most instances, the cost remains unnoticed because the busy educator is simultaneously absorbed in improving his own understanding.

While preparing for those educational encounters in which the teacher stimulates students, much energy must be devoted to assimilation, appraisal, interpretation, integration, research and discussion of the subject matter. The challenge often discourages the least of us and humbles the best of us. Then, while presenting the fruit of his intellectual growth through his lifetime, the teacher must be prepared to pull the information to be communicated out of his head in a fashion which is sufficiently impressive, captivating and dramatic and at the same time accurate, coherent and logical. In the interest of truth and reality, the teacher must simultaneously maintain a readiness to present gaps in knowledge, unsolved problems and shortcomings in understanding lest the student be left with the mistaken notion that all answers are already at hand. The latter process should not, however, become so pervasive that perspective is lost and the message is delivered that nothing is known. For if nothing is known then we have failed as teachers to preserve a cumulative record of the best of the past in our fields.

The tasks facing teachers are considerably aided but also to some extent hindered by the existence of current journals and symposia. Aids exist in the sense that many are working and publishing in areas relevant to the teacher's mission. Hindrance exists in the sense that too many conflicting and con-

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fusing voices are now extant. The conscientious teacher's work becomes more challenging in proportion to the proliferation of different voices in the modern knowledge explosion. If teachers fall short of what is necessary to bring order out of the modern multi-voiced chaos, our modern culture will collapse in confused oblivion, never having reaped the harvest of its intellectual riches.

The present conference represents, in miniature, the condition throughout the scientific community. It is a definite aid to the teacher and student who need perspective in an active field. It could be a hindrance as well if there were no recurring themes to help tie the many individual voices together.

Fortunately, we have those themes.

The conference was planned to reveal both the heterogeneity of representation in the thalamus and its detectable similarity of arrangement in a number of vertebrates. The meeting presented the message well. A good cross-section was given of what is known, what is being done currently and where we still require considerably more information.

The reader is urged to pay attention to what is done with the themes of functional representation in the thalamus and the emergence of a common ground plan. There is a common ground plan visible in mammals and a more basic ground plan appears in wider groups of vertebrates.

Different themes undoubtedly could be identified. Perhaps others would have stressed different views of the Conference on Basic Thalamic Structure and Function. We are content with those we have chosen to tie the sessions together. They have the advantage of encompassing yet not restraining the expressed individuality of our distinguished contributors.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to our contributors for gathering together to exchange views and present work on the basic organization of the thalamus. In like manner, we are extremely appreciative of the sympathetic help of Doctor CHANDLER MCC. Brooks, the members of administration, the Departments of Anatomy and Physiology whose efforts were essential to making this important conference possible.

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