Progress in Neurological Surgery

Volume 4

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The rate of increase of new knowledge in neurological surgery and related fields continues to evoke a spate of publications unreadable by any one person who is at the same time pursuing an active clinical career taking care of sick people. Indeed, the avalanche of literature throughout the
whole field of biology has precipitated such a feeling of despair among many scientists, that less rather than more reading of original scientific articles may be occurring. Our own distinguished neuroscientist and neurosurgeon Professor Lars Leksell, summarized this lugubrious attitude in a terse aphorism at the August 1970 meeting of the Scandinavian Neurosurgical Society in Stockholm—namely, ‘If you want to conceal what you are doing, publish it.’ Whatever sting of truth this witticism may have for the bulk of biologists in general and neurosurgeons in particular, it is our fervent hope that precisely the reverse has proven to be the case vis-à-vis the approach taken by the distinguished men who have contributed the chapters to this volume and are writing those in the volumes to come. The objectives of each author have been and remain: 1) a comprehensive followup study of his own clinical material and that in his clinic on the topic he is considering; 2) an exhaustive search of the world literature in all languages in the same subject; and most importantly 3) a critical distillation of what is valuable for theory and practice as judged by his experience and reading. Acceptance of such an assignment by every author has involved a major commitment of time and intellectual stamina; the editors are grateful to each of them for their willingness to respond positively to such an invitation. Confronted by the demands of his other local, national and international obligations, the final product of each essayist may or may not reach the standard he set for himself. If we editors may venture to extrapolate from our experience we should say that each author has these feelings. When the completed manuscript finally leaves his hands, he has misgivings which are compounded of uncertainty as to whether this type of effort really represented the best use of this time, and of concern lest his work and analyses fail to do justice to his subject. These misgivings experienced by some authors are groundless, whereas in the case of others they are not without foundation. The task of an individual who contributes to a volume with multiple authorship is usually quite literally thankless. Yet, if we practicing neurosurgeons are to get our advice from the men of broadest experience and soundest judgment, the subjects must be morcellated into fragments of size manageable for evaluation by one busy neurosurgical team. Hence we continue to divide a general subject and its volume into numerous chapters, each of separate authorship. We strongly urge the readers to provide ‘feedback’ to these authors. Please tell those whose work you applaud and have been helped by; the thanks will buoy them up—might
even encourage them to accept the invitation to write another of these burdensome chapters for another volume! And please make known to those and other authors your constructive criticisms and the experiences which lead you to disagree with them. The editors too would be grateful for advice on proper subjects for volumes in the near future, suggestions for contributors of specific chapters, and any thoughts as to how the volumes may be made more useful to the primary audience for which they are written, i.e. practicing neurosurgeons. Our addresses are printed below further to encourage a letter from you.

Our final paragraph in this preface conveys our own very special thanks to Dr. R. Lewis Wright. This is his fourth and last volume as assistant editor, a role he has performed with extraordinary diligence. He and his wife Sarah have rendered more readable and more comprehensible every line in nearly every chapter of the 4 volumes. Especially those chapters sent to us in English by authors with some other native tongue required not only editorial effort but also at times minor surgery for the meaning to be presented in idiomatic English. We in Boston are missing both of the Wrights and wishing them well in their present more exclusively clinical activities.

November 1970

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