Book Reviews


A symposium was held in London in July 1994 to commemorate the retirement of Professor Michael Bradbury as Professor of Physiology at King’s College London. Mike Bradbury had had a substantial influence on blood–brain barrier studies, not just on the London scene, but also nationally and internationally. I caught up with his work in the early 1970s, having spent a number of years investigating the demyelinating diseases. It was clear that a proper understanding of the contributing role of blood–brain barrier changes was going to be essential. Mike Bradbury’s work was at once stimulating and illuminating. It was also a reference source, notably his 1979 book The Concept of a Blood–Brain Barrier, the title of which was adapted for the Festschrift held in his honour. The proceedings of the symposium have now been published as a book containing the 31 papers presented.

Since blood–brain barrier studies represent such an extensive and dynamic research field in neuroscience it is not surprising that a new book appears every few years to assess the current state of knowledge. The last major work was The Blood–Brain Barrier: Cellular and Molecular Biology, edited by W. M. Pardridge (1993). Comparisons may be invidious but that is what this business is about. The Pardridge book was a significant landmark, being the first collection of review chapters on molecular aspects of the blood–brain barrier. Both its publication and purchase were therefore well justified. With the present book the situation is not so clear. The chapters are almost entirely presentations of the authors’ own work, some of them are only a few pages long and several assume the conventional research paper format of ‘Introduction’, ‘Materials and Methods’, etc. In no sense are the chapters reviews of our current state of knowledge of the blood–brain barrier topics. More likely they represent research findings which have been or will be published in more detail elsewhere in science journals. At a cost of £70 it is difficult to see the book selling readily. In the past libraries often bought scientific symposia published in book form. In the present financial climate, hard-pressed university libraries are likely to be very discriminating about book buying and less inclined to purchase symposia books. My own view is that this symposium and its central figure would have been better served by the proceedings appearing as a journal supplement. Having said that, many of the papers included make fascinating reading. The chapters cover a very wide range of blood–brain barrier topics and are written by authorities in the field from several countries throughout the world. Such a gathering of scientists in one place, plus many others attending, is no doubt a measure of the esteem in which Mike Bradbury and his work are held.

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Surface anatomy is one of the most important aspects of anatomical teaching to preclinical students since it will form the basis of much of their appreciation of physical signs when they proceed to their clinical studies. Moreover, as the title of this book implies, the subject is of continuing interest even in postgraduate years. Most medical schools now appreciate this and have practical classes dedicated to this subject (perhaps better called ‘living anatomy’) often supplemented by in-house videos.

The second edition of Professor Lumley’s book will be welcomed by teachers and students alike. It is brief, and beautifully illustrated with really excellent colour photographs, many of which have numbered overlays of underlying structures. The text is supplemented by copious notes of the clinical significance of the anatomical features. Of course, there is always room for expansion. With increasing interest in laparoscopic surgery, and reports of massive abdominal wall haematomas therefrom, a note on the position of the inferior epigastric vessels would be useful. Similarly, keen house officers inserting chest tubes in a hurry can damage the internal thoracic vessels unless reminded of their position.

Is there a prize for spotting pathology in the healthy young subjects of the photographs? The brave volunteer for the illustration for the surface anatomy of the perineum has what looks to me like a resolving perianal haematoma. This book, in its second edition, will reinforce its position as a valuable addition to our existing atlases of surgical anatomy.

Harold Ellis