Book Review


The second edition of this book, which first appeared in 1976, has been enlarged by the addition of five new chapters on biochemical tests, five additional appendixes, additional photographs, and two indexes. The five new chapters discuss the CAMP test, deoxyribonuclease (DNase) and thermonuclease tests, hippurate hydrolysis, Neisseria carbohydrate utilization tests, and starch hydrolysis. Unfortunately, the author did not include at least one test for detecting beta-lactamase production even though this is not used for identification per se.

This reviewer is surprised that the author has not attempted to correct the many errors that appeared in the first edition of her book. Rather, she has reproduced most of them verbatim in this edition and added even more in the new chapters. The errors of scientific fact are complemented by those of poor English, faulty syntax, and simple carelessness in (or absence of) proofreading. Indeed, I doubt that either edition was proofread by anyone. If this seems like unjustly harsh criticism, perhaps a few examples will illustrate that it is not. The preface provides a good example of what to expect later, since we find both factual and grammatical mistakes. In the preface, and throughout the book, the spelling “cAMP” is used instead of “CAMP.” The author uses the abbreviation for cyclic adenosine monophosphate rather than the acronym formed from Christie, Atkins, and Munch-Petersen, discoverers of the test. Also in the preface we find the incorrect usage, “...those whom may...” Instead of “...those whom may...”

In the first chapter is titled, “Alkaline Phosphatase, Heat-Resistant Test,” implying that the test itself is heat resistant. On page 3 the statement appears, “At present, there are no biochemical means to differentiate P. aeruginosa from P. pseudomallei (7).” Not only is this incorrect, but on page 430 the author presents a biochemical scheme for doing just that. In the second chapter, on page 5, the author says, “Esculin production may be demonstrated...” instead of “Esculin hydrolysis...” On page 8, still referring to hydrolysis of esculin, the author states “Hydrolysis is determined by florescent...” (my italics).

Errors in choice of words can be explained by poor editing or proofreading, but factual errors are far less explainable. A good illustration is the exceptionally inaccurate and confused text on page 20 regarding staphylococcal beta-hemolysin and beta-lysin, in which these are treated as separate entities when in fact they are identical. These are only a few of the many mistakes found. The point above regarding staphylococcal hemolysins indicates a major difficulty of the book. The author documents the majority of her text with references to published literature, but she has quoted indiscriminately from both accurate and inaccurate reports, many of the latter being outdated and now known to be wrong. A good example is found on page 157, where the author states (regarding group B streptococci), “Bovine strains split hippurate but none of the human types possess this ability...” The reference cited was published in 1922, some 11 years before Lancefield’s classic publication on serological grouping of beta-hemolytic streptococci.

This is not a book that can be recommended. In particular, it should be avoided by students and non-microbiologists, who, although they will become acutely aware of its grammatical errors, probably will not have sufficient background to recognize the scientific misinformation and errors.

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