BOOKS RECEIVED

Notes on medical bacteriology

This is a very good little book, moderately priced, up to date and comprehensive. As the title suggests, the subject is treated at a very superficial level and it is very debatable who will want to buy the book, even at this price.

The authors intend it primarily for Scottish medical students. One can but applaud the conservative approach to their training, which has produced some giants in the field of bacteriology to help support an otherwise ailing and still deteriorating speciality elsewhere in the UK. It would not be ideal south of the border where students are expected to know less about classification and identification for their primary examination. This book could well be read just once—something that can be done in about 2 hours by a quick reader—by any technician, graduate or "doctor", about to take up clinical bacteriology. For this purpose, it might well be advisable to borrow a copy.

There are, as in all books, some rather major points to which exception should be taken. No modern text should include a picture of an uncontrolled disk sensitivity test without comment. The staining method recommended for acidfast bacilli is the historical one of Ziehl-Neelsen. Ten years ago it was authoritatively suggested that this was suitable only for very small laboratories. Agar-agar was suggested as a gelling agent not by Koch but by Frau Hesse, drawing on her culinary experience.

The book also has its share of the little howlers that gladden the heart of any reviewer. The line drawing of the Wright brothers' original lighter-than-air flying machine coming at us from the photograph of how to plate backwards and the explanatory line drawing, confirming that this is indeed the preferred technique, turns out on close inspection to be fig 5.1 crossed out. It undoubtedly should not be there. Equally, fig. 13.1 shows just the way not to prepare an Elek plate if the precipitin lines are not to be lost in the inoculum.

Finally, the book goes from the sublime to the ridiculous or perhaps vice versa in suggesting, for further reading, Topley and Wilson. If followed, this advice could result in severe psychological trauma in at least a proportion of the readers.

J. H. DARRELL

Applied medical microbiology

When I reviewed Professor Collee's first edition some 5 years ago I concluded that it fulfilled quite admirably the needs of students of elementary clinical microbiology, but that it had certain idiosyncrasies. The second edition retains a great deal of the character, and indeed the material, of the original but has some distinct improvements. A complete resetting in a bolder typeface together with redrawing of many figures—including some that I found difficult to understand previously—makes it much easier to follow. It is interesting, too, that the original frontispiece photograph, an electronmicrograph of staphylococci, has been replaced by a much more appropriate gram-stained film of infected urine. There are new sections on, among other things, radioimmunoassay, ELISA, periodontal disease and dental caries, NGU, post-operative wound infections, transposons and laboratory safety, keeping pace with developments. There is considerable rewriting throughout but the redrafted chapters on sterilisation and disinfection and preventive microbiology are substantially improved. I was also happy to see some of the more technical intrusions of the first edition modified or removed—for example, the diagram of a needle-mount preparation of a fungal culture.