BOOKS RECEIVED

Topley and Wilson's Principles of Bacteriology, Virology and Immunity, 8th edition

The 8th edition of this work has appeared 6-7 years after the previous edition. There have been no major changes in style or format from the 7th edition, apart from an increase in page size and the additional volume 5, which contains a comprehensive, cumulative index. The latter is a welcome addition. The four main volumes cover general bacteriology and immunity (vol 1), systematic bacteriology (vol 2), bacterial diseases (vol 3), and virology (vol 4).

The book continues to adhere to a format "somewhere between a monograph and a conventional textbook". This style will continue to infuriate those readers with an unhealthy addiction to exhaustive reference lists, but allows for a very readable text with licence for the author to provide a somewhat more interpretive view of current data. The multi-author approach, with authors drawn from the spheres of medical, veterinary and environmental bacteriology, as well as virology and immunology, inevitably leads to variations in style and presentation from chapter to chapter. In some chapters, tables, schematic diagrams, small print sections and the bold type face have been skillfully used to break up the text improving readability. Other chapters are rather more daunting, with pages of unbroken symmetrical text. For most chapters, references are reasonably up to date, the latest being 1988, reflecting the 2-year delay for publication.

It is impossible in a short review to comment in detail on each individual contribution to such an enormous work. Most of us with a specialist axe to grind will find fault or wish to question some statement or section within the book. The optimal structure for presenting the enormous amount of data that appears in this book remains a problem. The general introductory notes and the prefaces to each of the volumes suggest there was some debate about the best format. Vol 3 (bacterial diseases) remains a particular problem. The editors have chosen a mixture of organism-related and disease-orientated chapters. From a clinical microbiologist's point of view, this makes the volume rather awkward as a reference text. There is some overlap between chapters and a considerable amount of cross-referencing is required. Personally, I feel the separate volume on virology sits uncomfortably on its own. Discussing basic virology in vol 1 and moving systematic virology to vol 2 would be a reasonable solution; this would then allow the clinical virology to move to its more logical position in a more disease-orientated vol 3.

Unlike many similar comprehensive texts aimed principally at medical microbiologists, "Topley and Wilson" continues to include a considerable amount of data on animal infections. However, the amount of veterinary microbiology has been reduced from earlier editions, presumably due to lack of space. It might be argued that some of the space still occupied by purely animal conditions could be devoted more usefully to relevant mycology and parasitology, which have traditionally not been included. However, achieving the best balancing of the merits of the book does not do justice to the research and development in this area. The index is poor and finding particular topics can be difficult; e.g., the account of febrile convulsions is, rather idiosyncratically, in the chapter otherwise limited to childhood skin rashes. One also gets the impression that the book had a long gestation period—some sections are more out of date than others. The chapter on AIDS was obviously one of the last to be written and is reasonably current but in others the latest articles recommended for further reading date from the 1970s or early 1980s. Finally, although a book of this length cannot possibly contain detailed discussion of the many controversies in the management of infectious diseases, there are a number of unexpected omissions: the control of methicillin-resistant staphylococci and the haemolytic-uraemic syndrome are barely mentioned; gonococcal infection is not referred to in the chapter dealing with septic arthritis; and there is no place at all for sinusitis, otitis media or bronchitis.

In their preface, the authors express the hope that the content will be relevant to a wide medical readership: clinical microbiologists, infectious disease physicians, the new breed of consultants in communicable disease control and others involved in monitoring public health, and those working in the field of antimicrobial drug development.
within the pharmaceutical industry. This is a diverse group and hence the authors set themselves a formidable challenge, one that in retrospect they may well consider overambitious. I am sure that they would accept that this book is unlikely to be sufficiently detailed to serve as a reference source for specialists, most of whom will have access to more weighty and exhaustive tomes. Any disappointment they may feel in this assessment, however, ought to be tempered: whether by serendipity or design, this book provides a commendable overview of infection for the medical student and for all grades of hospital doctors outside the microbial-disease specialities. I can recommend it to such an audience and expect it to sell well.

M. Wood