Immunopathology of the skin


Since the initial description of autoantibody of pemphigus by Beutner and Jordan in 1964, immunofluorescent-labelled antibody techniques have become increasingly popular for the diagnosis and investigation of skin diseases. Apart from the editors, 44 distinguished authors from nine countries have contributed to this book on the principles and practice of immunofluorescence techniques.

The first chapter describes clearly the indications for direct and indirect immunofluorescence and grades the information obtained as diagnostic (as in pemphigus, pemphigoid and dermatitis herpetiformis), characteristic (lupus erythematosus and its variants) or merely interesting (vasculitis and psoriasis). This is followed by two very useful chapters on methods, with particular emphasis on those aspects of technique that determine reliability of results. Most of the book is devoted to detailed reviews of the immunofluorescence findings and their interpretation in various diseases. Where there is controversy, e.g., in the case of "mixed connective tissue disease", linear IgA deposits in dermatitis herpetiformis-like diseases of children and adults and the stratum-corneum antibody in psoriasis, the different views are presented, usually in adjacent chapters. The book is largely devoted to the use of immunofluorescence, but there is a most useful review on enzyme-antibody methods, particularly with immunoperoxidase.

Although the book is titled Immunopathology of the skin, those disorders that cannot be investigated readily by labelled-antibody techniques are discussed either cursorily or not at all. To this extent the title is misleading, in that the immunofluorescence findings are not interpreted in a broader immunological context. The only chapter that attempts to do this is on the "Nature of autoimmunity" but, unfortunately, this is one of the least readable contributions; it might have been easier to follow if it had been placed at the end of the book.

There can be no doubt that this is a most useful, if expensive, compendium of practical information on labelled-antibody techniques in dermatology, providing an up-to-date review of the literature.

C. KENNEDY

The molecular biology of picornaviruses


This book is based on the proceedings of a meeting held in Maratea in Italy in September 1978 and consists of 17 chapters of variable quality and interest. As one would expect, most of the information presented is already available elsewhere; nevertheless there is certainly a justification for books of this nature in that it allows contributors to present their speculations in a rational way and also provides an invaluable source of information for those wishing to be brought up to date (i.e., to 1978) with current research.

One distinct disadvantage of organising and publishing the proceedings of a meeting on such a relatively restricted topic is that there will inevitably be overlaps of interest which will, in turn, lead to a degree of reiteration with somewhat soporific consequences. This is reflected in the book, in which subjects recur with regularity in two, three or even four chapters. Thus, the processing of polyprotein, the significance of poly C tracts and the mechanism of cellular polypeptide inhibition, amongst others, receive repeated attention. The organiser of the meeting was obviously well aware of this defect and had prudently persuaded a number of eminent researchers in related fields to make a contribution and this is no doubt added some perspective to the meeting and has certainly improved the quality of the book.

The initial chapter by Scraba provides a very useful summary of the current state of play of research on the structural aspects of picornaviruses, particularly with respect to the protein