BOOKS RECEIVED

Aspects of slow and persistent virus infections

This volume records the papers and discussions at a workshop, sponsored by the Commission of the European Communities on the advice of the Committee on Medical and Public Health Research, which took place in London in April 1979.

Interest in slow and persistent viruses has spread during the past few years, but a clear view is difficult for those unacquainted with this large, growing and heterogenous field. This book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive cover but comprises accounts of current areas of interest together with some topics of more general relevance.

Four papers (from Belfast, Wurzburg, Cambridge and London) are devoted to subacute sclerosing panencephalitis with particular attention being paid to the immune response and to the nature of the measles-like virus responsible for this condition. The biology of the scrapie agent and the pathogenesis of the disease are described in papers from the Agricultural Research Council establishments at Compton and Edinburgh. Maedi-visna receive attention in reports from Iceland and the Netherlands. Areas that would not immediately spring to mind as examples of slow or persistent infection, but were alluded to, include the RNA tumour viruses, with an account of their general biology and a review of the evidence for their presence in man. There is a review of the biological effects of interferon. Persistent infections, particularly with the ECHO viruses, in sex-linked hypogammaglobulinaemia, have recently attracted some attention and a paper is concerned with this problem. A final report deals with the recently described virus-like agents that have been detected in patients with psychiatric illnesses. The full discussions which these papers provoked are briefly summarised.

This volume forms one of a series entitled "New perspectives in clinical microbiology" and succeeds admirably in this aim. The papers form more than merely a record of scientific meeting and the reader will obtain a useful conspectus of the growing points, clearly described by active and authoritative workers. This book would form a valuable addition to any microbiological library and, by present day standards, is possibly cheap enough for the professional microbiologist to purchase for himself. With the exception of the omission of some authors from the list of contributors, there are very few errors and, again by present day standards, publication has not been unduly delayed.

R. N. P. SUTTON

Comprehensive virology—vol. 14. Newly characterised vertebrate viruses

It was an ambitious plough to which Fraenkel-Conrat and Wagner put their hand when they started this series, and now they have reached volume 14 it is clear that there is no looking back. The volume contains chapters on particular groups of viruses, and also on the special topic of fish viruses and virus infections. The subjects covered are Bunyamaviridae, arenaviruses, coronavirus, caliciviruses, arboviruses, and the icosahedral cytoplasmic DNA viruses. The eighth chapter, on the human viruses of hepatitis A and B, completes the volume. Each of these chapters is complete—perhaps too complete—in itself, which inevitably makes the book a collection of monographs rather than a coherent volume. However, the standard of the individual contributions is high, and the value of the book as a reference book is considerable. It is, perhaps, invidious to single out individual contributions, but the chapter on arenaviruses is

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commendable because of the current interest in the virus of Lassa fever, and the final chapter by Robinson has, rightly, a considerable amount of the new material about the hepatitis A virus, as well as an account of the classical knowledge of the present day about hepatitis B. This book deserves a place on the shelves of virus department and institute libraries—and indeed, all places where they work with viruses.

A. P. Waterson

Clinical bacteriology

This book aims, in the words of the preface, “to provide the essentials of clinical bacteriology for those involved in the diagnosis and management of the infected patient, including medical and dental students, hospital medical staff and general practitioners”. The author, who is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Bacteriology at the University of Edinburgh Medical School, has based his book on the approach used in teaching bacteriology to students in that school, namely “systems-orientated” rather than “organism-orientated”. The earlier chapters are on sources and spread of infections, bacterial pathogenicity, prevention, diagnosis and treatment. These are followed by individual chapters on infections of the various systems of the body. Each chapter is followed by a few suggestions for further reading, and there is a short but adequate index.

The book provides the student with a lucid introduction to the study of bacteriology, and there is no doubt that the systems-based approach is helpful and provides information in a logical way, and the knowledge can easily be related to the student’s work in anatomy, physiology and pathology. The introductory chapters are concise and clear, and the author is particularly to be commended on the section on collection of specimens and liaison with the laboratory; one hopes that the embryo doctor will appreciate from the outset the benefits to all concerned, particularly the patient, of close liaison between the clinician and the microbiologist.

Inevitably, there are some criticisms; many of these are omissions in the interests of conciseness, e.g., the author has wisely restricted the discussion of hypochlorite disinfectants to generalities and avoided the confusing matters of percentages and “parts per million” that are so essential in the use of these compounds. One would question whether the infectivity of an organism is the same as its pathogenic potential and, strictly speaking, the Bowie-Dick test is a test of steam penetration rather than successful sterilisation. In the discussion of gas gangrene, there is insufficient emphasis on hyperbaric oxygen and too much on the use of polyvalent antitoxin. The section on antimicrobial chemotherapy provides a rather cursory account of this rapidly expanding field, and there are no references in this section later than 1975. Again, there is a clear need for conciseness in a book of this nature, but the student should be provided with more guidance in this field; e.g., the new generation of cephalosporins do not appear, and there is no mention of the severe side effects of the lincomycins.

The fairly detailed chapter on infections of the mouth reflects the author’s interest, and will make the book valuable for dental as well as for medical students.

In summary, this small book will, for a modest price, provide the student of medicine or dentistry with a concise and useful introduction to the study of clinical bacteriology, minor criticisms notwithstanding.

H. W. K. Fell

Medical mycology—proceedings of mycological symposia of the XII International Congress of Microbiology

The 46 papers presented at this meeting are classified under Dimorphism, Ecology of human pathogenic fungi, Contamination and elimination of fungi in areas of risk, Antigenic properties