BOOKS RECEIVED

Comprehensive virology


"When completed ", runs the information on the dust jacket of vols. 1 and 2, "'Comprehensive Virology' will contain approximately 22 volumes and more than 6,000 pages". Volumes 1 and 2 are at hand. Volume 1, a host in itself, is replete with such varied information as the amino-acid sequences of the coat proteins of RNA phages, and lists the names of most of even the more exotic arboviruses. This book is quite useful as a source of information, but the information is surprisingly unhomogeneous and unevenly distributed, e.g., eight lines on the insect picornavirus Nodamura and only four on mumps. Taxonomically, there are potential pitfalls for the uninitiated, e.g., the myxovirus group is described as "also called orthomyxovirus" (and in any case the writer really means the influenza group). Nevertheless, it certainly is a very useful reference book, and Dr Fraenkel-Conrat is to be congratulated on his descriptive catalogue. It might have been even more useful if this had been a joint effort with a specialist in animal viruses.

Volume 2 goes in at the deep end as the first of a number of volumes on the reproduction of viruses, in this case small and intermediate RNA viruses. It has five chapters, each a monograph in itself, on RNA phages (L. Eoyang and J. T. August), small plant RNA viruses (Albert Siegel and V. Hariharasubramanian), picornaviruses (Leon Levintow), togaviruses (Elmer R. Pflefferkorn and Daniel Shapiro), and reoviruses (Wolfgang K. Joklik). These are all sound, comprehensive and readable reviews. Like volume 1, this will be an indispensable reference book. In a day of falling standards it is a pleasure to congratulate the publishers on the very clear printing and excellent layout of both volumes.

A. P. Waterson

Human intestinal flora

It is a tribute to the authors that their book presents problems to the reviewer, for they deal competently with so many different aspects of their subject. Various specialist readers will note some inadequacies in several chapters. For example, at least one British team would ask Dr Drasar and Dr Hill to moderate their now outdated claim (p. 7) that "the use of an anaerobic cabinet enables approximately 100 times more bacteria to be isolated from a specimen of faeces than can be isolated using the standard techniques". Clinical and research microbiologists with interests in acute diarrhoeal disease will find the relevant chapter (pp. 183-192) disappointing in its presentation, although full of useful information.

These are carping criticisms. There is a good analysis of a complex literature on the intestinal bacterial flora of man and a helpful account of factors that may control or influence the flora of the gut. The section of major importance—on the metabolic activities of intestinal bacteria—will be of wide interest to gastroenterologists, biochemists, microbiologists and toxicologists. There are more speculative but stimulating discussions of the flora in relation to conditions such as malabsorption and hepatic disease, and there is a comprehensive consideration of the role of bacteria in the aetiology of cancer.

A significant proportion of the text is clearly concerned with work in which the authors are authoritatively and intensively involved. The volume provides much information, a valuable source of references, and a splendid stimulus for further research.

J. G. Collee

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