approach to the problems of epilepsy. It deserves a place in any neurological and neurophysiological library. Hughlings Jackson would have approved.

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Clinical Biochemistry of Alcoholism, edited by Sidney B. Rosalki, *Contemporary Issues in Clinical Biochemistry*. Vol. 1. Pp. x + 305, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £32.00.

This book is the first in a new series headed *Contemporary Issues in Clinical Biochemistry* and designed to update the clinician and chemist in established and developing areas of the subject. Other titles in preparation include 'Therapeutic drug monitoring', 'Clinical biochemistry nearer the patient', 'Clinical biochemistry of hospital nutrition', 'Developmental clinical biochemistry' and 'Acid-base equilibrium and blood gases'.

The book made enjoyable and, in most places, easy reading. It certainly brought me up to date in an important and rapidly moving area of clinical medicine; and it was a timely reminder of our general incomprehension of many of the molecular mechanisms responsible for disease processes. The text divides clearly into two sections, the first dealing with alcoholism in the community and the second with the clinical complications of the disease which we commonly meet in hospital practice. The presentations from each of the 18 contributors were well balanced and Dr Rosalki, the editor, did a fair job in weeding out areas of gross overlap. However, there still remain a few irritating examples of this in the text, most prominent being the appearance on four occasions of the biochemical processes involved in alcohol oxidation. Erudition varied to some extent from contributor to contributor. I was least impressed with the chapters which outlined our understanding of the biochemical markers which predispose to alcoholism (there don't seem to be any), which examined the problem of alcohol intoxication, and which addressed the influence of alcohol on the gastrointestinal tract and pancreatic function. On the other hand, Dr Rosalki's contributions were particularly lucid and I learned a lot from the chapter on nutrition and vitamins in alcoholism. The same applies to the exposition of porphyrin metabolism which, although not always strictly adherent to the subject, provided useful background information on the porphyrias in general. I think this volume (and, it is to be hoped, its successors) will be welcomed in medical libraries. It undoubtedly has gained a slot on my bookshelf.

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Current Perspectives in the Immunology of Respiratory Diseases, edited by A.B. Kay and Edward J. Goetzl. *Contemporary Issues in Clinical Immunology and Allergy*. Vol. 3. Pp. v + 167, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £19.50.

This is the third volume in the series on Clinical Immunology and Allergy edited by Barry Kay and Ed Goetzl. This deals with respiratory disease and covers a spectrum of 'Immunological conditions'. At the one end are allergic reactions in the lung leading to the clinical syndromes of asthma and extrinsic allergic alveolitis, where the immunological reactions are moderately well understood and are believed to involve external agents. A chapter on pulmonary eosinophilia discusses identified agents and uncertain ones, as well as uncertain underlying mechanisms. Then there is a chapter on defective immunity leading to pulmonary problems moving through connective tissue diseases involving the lung, where the nature of the immunological events becomes more obscure, although the consensus is that they involve reactions with intrinsic antigens – some sort of autoimmunity occurring in the lungs. In the later chapters on sarcoidosis, interstitial fibrosis and lung cancer, the immunological mechanisms involved become more speculative.

Given the brief to pursue the immunological aspects of their subjects the authors have done a creditable job of covering this important organ system where specific and non-specific immune mechanisms are in constant interaction, although inevitably there is some unevenness of approach. The feeling on reading this book is that there is still much that remains to be explained. A number of chapters, while providing a perspective of present positions, have little new to say, with few references after 1981. The best chapters are undoubtedly those from the Brompton Hospital and that on pulmonary fibrosis. This is the weakest volume of the series so far, and one must hope that the promise of the earlier volumes will be maintained.

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Diabetes and Metformin: a Research and Clinical Update. Proceedings of an International Symposium sponsored by Zyma-Nederland and Lipha-Lyon (F), held in Rotterdam 7 May 1984, edited by H.M.J. Krans. *International Congress and Symposium Series*. No. 79. Pp. vii + 50, illustrated. Royal Society of Medicine, London. Distributed by Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985. £7.50.

We have been using metformin in the treatment of type 2 diabetes for nearly 30 years. We know it reduces an elevated blood sugar but we still do not know how. Despite this hypoglycaemic action, paradoxically there is no hard evidence that in the long term metformin reduces the incidence of complications. Faced with a drug whose mode of action is uncertain and whose long term benefits are unsure, there is every reason for an informed review. Unfortunately, this symposium offers little enlightenment. It contains six communications, followed by brief discussions, but not all