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. Goetzel. *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 Goetzel. 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 11

deal with diabetes and metformin. One paper is on the mechanism of insulin action, another on insulin sensitive glucose uptake and a third on lipid metabolism. Of the three communications dealing with metformin, one discusses its anti-hyperglycaemic action, another its effect on non-diabetic lipid metabolism and a third compares the risks involved with those of using a sulphonylurea. So that, although the communications contain useful information, as a review of diabetes and metformin this symposium carried us very little further.

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Endocrine Tumours: the Pathobiology of Regulatory Peptide-Producing Tumours, Julia M. Polak and Stephen R. Bloom. *Current Problems in Tumour Pathology: The Pathobiology of Malignant Disease*. Vol. 1. Pp. vii + 288, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £35.00.

This volume makes an exciting start to an attractive new series edited by Professors Nicolas Wright and John Azzopardi, to be followed by others on Gastric Carcinomas (Filipe & Jass), Lung Carcinomas (McDowell), and Malignant Lymphomas (Lauder & Habeshaw). 'Pathobiology' has a contemporary ring and presumably encompasses both abnormal and normal structure and function in all species.

There are 31 contributors to the 15 chapters, 10 of which are devoted to elegant accounts of today's knowledge and understanding of general aspects of the subject – such as genetic engineering in endocrinology (Hillyard), biosynthesis of neuroendocrine peptides in normal and tumour cells (Steiner *et al.*), clonality and endocrine peptide (APUD) tumours (Pearse), *in vitro* models for studying the pathobiology of endocrine tumours, and clinical utility of neuron-specific enolase as a neuroendocrine tumour marker (Marangos). The other five chapters are more concerned with specific tumours in the gut and pancreas (Sabate *et al.*), the lung (Sheppard *et al.*), the thyroid (Williams), the pituitary (Van Noorden *et al.*), and in the endocrine syndromes (Ch'ng *et al.*).

There is a vast amount of readable and well-referenced information here, much of it obtained or inspired by Julia Polak and Stephen Bloom, of scientific and clinical, as well as educational and examination, value, so that it may be thought churlish to observe that the book does not, in addition, highlight and expose the gaps in today's knowledge and understanding. Like so many biomedical texts it gives the student the impression that all is now known, thus frustrating the hope raised by the series title 'Current Problems'. Nevertheless, it is a *sine qua non* for pathobiology departments, as I am sure those that follow it will also be.

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Essential Management of Obstetric Emergencies, Thomas F. Baskett. Pp. xi + 221, illustrated. John Wiley, Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, 1985. £17.50.

The author of this excellent book spent ten years as a consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology in a remote area of the Canadian north. The personal experience he gained there has placed him in an ideal position to write a book about the management of obstetric emergencies.

The author gives the reader his plan for the management of all common obstetric emergencies. Where there are still areas of clinical disagreement amongst obstetricians he points these out so that the reader can look further, as the scope of this book is necessarily limited.

The occasional North American bias becomes obvious, magnesium sulphate for instance being the first line of treatment in eliminating pre-eclampsia. In Britain this treatment is rarely used. However, this need not detract from what is essentially a practical, clear and helpful book.

This book is well written with clear diagrams. It would be an excellent guide for midwives or any obstetrician in training and would find a welcome place on the reference shelf of any labour ward.

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Herpes, AIDS and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Derek Llewellyn-Jones. Pp. 155, illustrated. Faber and Faber, London, Boston, 1985. £2.95 (paperback), £6.95 (cased).

This is a well produced and profusely illustrated paperback directed at young people, parents . . . and all professionals working in this field of medicine.

The first chapter 'Questions and Answers' is clear and well thought out and is probably a very useful part of the book. The second chapter 'The Problem of Sexually Transmitted Diseases Today' takes the global view and thus attempts to cover the overlapping behavioural, social and epidemiological aspects of the subject. It does reflect the author's pragmatic and enlightened views. However, the venereal diseases are not legally notifiable in the United Kingdom. Compulsory notification has been tried in several countries and was found to be counterproductive. It has only succeeded in sweeping the problem under the carpet, resulting in false estimates of prevalence. Factual statistics are essential if you are going to plan realistically for adequate medical and educational facilities.

The book could appropriately have included useful information about the well organized network of clinics in the United Kingdom which are open in convenient locations to patients all over the country and which provide free and confidential examination and treatment. Attached to these clinics are trained health advisers who are experienced in gaining the confidence and the voluntary co-operation of the patients in tracing the contacts. This non-coercive system is very successful and many countries are sending their personnel to be trained along similar lines.