Book Reviews

Annual Review of Immunology, Vol. 8, edited by W.E. Paul, C. Garrison Fathman and Henry Metzger. Pp. 819. Annual Reviews Inc, Palo Alto, California, 1990. \$38.00 (USA & Canada) \$42 elsewhere.

Review volumes on immunology can be compared with other newspapers and periodicals; they cater for readers with different tastes ranging from serious scholars of current events to those who prefer a more simplistic presentation. By this analogy, the series of *Annual Reviews of Immunology* is perfect for readers of 'up-market' newspapers or even Times supplements. This is not a conclusion based on a uncritical preference for prolixity. The editors of this volume, like its predecessors, have commissioned chapters by scientists who favour reasoned arguments, unvarnished data regardless of their complexity, dispassionate synthesis and a honed, elegant economy of style. They eschew facile theories and shortcuts through the available data yet the enthusiasm is evident and infectious.

This volume therefore is designed for readers who prefer solid sustenance to pap. For example it can perfectly well be tackled by doctors unversed in immunology, and not just by mature immunologists. A willingness to engage in disciplined mental concentration is a prerequisite whereas prior knowledge of the subject is not. It is not recommended to those who struggle into wakefulness only when a lecturer announces that he is just about to deliver their 'take home message'. The book is not encyclopaedic so that readers may or may not find the dish of their choice on this year's menu. There are safe offerings, such as chapters on the T cell receptor complex and immunity to HIV. But there are also unfamiliar morsels, such as contributions on the function of bone marrow stromal cells and catalytic antibodies.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to browse enjoyably and profitably through this book. Brigitte Askonas' miniature autobiography makes delightful reading, with a highly salutary message for aspiring immunologists that the road to fortune starts with a grounding in biochemistry. Her piece also demonstrates that immunologists can write as clearly and lyrically as anyone. Acolytes will even find sympathy in this volume; '... currently accumulation of data is proceeding more rapidly than integration of data' declare Ullman *et al.* (page 441). They should also draw courage from Peter Medawar's dictum, implicit in many of this book's chapters, that the accumulation of knowledge eventually leads to simplification. Furthermore, while there are publishers still prepared to offer feasts like this at soup kitchen prices, medical and scientific readers can rejoice that philanthropy in the cause of learning is alive and flourishing.

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Cancer of the Colon and Rectum, The Seventh King's Fund Forum Consensus Statement, King's Fund Centre, 126 Albert Street, London NW1, 1990.

This small volume encompasses many questions associated with the treatment of colo-rectal polyps and preventative measures to reduce the incidence and mortality of colo-rectal cancer. The efficacy of modern treatments and suggestions for the direction of future research are also covered. Where there are clear answers to problems of screening and patient review, these are clearly stated, as are the quandaries that still exist and the areas which are inappropriate for investigation and treatment.

The clear summary of these important areas of concern, together with practical guidelines for the management of patients, are comprehensively treated.

This is a very useful little volume, which should be mandatory reading for all medical students and doctors whose practice involves patients with colo-rectal problems. It could also prove of great help to patients enquiring about the risks of malignant disease, especially if they belong to a high risk group.

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Current Surgical Practice, Vol. 5, edited by John Hadfield, Michael Hobsley and Tom Treasure. Pp. 300, illustrated. Hodder and Stoughton, London, Auckland, Melbourne, 1990. Paperback £24.50.

This 5th volume in the series continues to record lectures given at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The authors are asked to express their opinion rather than to present standard review articles.

The book contains a fascinating selection of topics and includes in its second half a symposium on iatrogenic surgical disease. Before turning to this section, my eye was caught by the first chapter on specialism and generalism in surgery, written by one of the editors. This certainly presents the author's personal views; I found several points of difference of opinion. That does not necessarily detract from the value of the chapter!

The section on iatrogenic disease opens with a consideration of the philosophy of medical defence which is a salutary reminder of the standards required of all medical practitioners and of the appropriate response if injury should occur. Each chapter in this section contains an analysis of the causes of the particular complication under discussion, followed by a description of the means of prevention and finally details of treatment. They are almost all of high quality, with only the chapter on anorectal stenosis being disappointing in its brevity. There are excellent contributions on facial palsy, the laryngeal nerves, bile duct injuries, and the ureter, to mention only some, although I believe that on page 271 the surgeon should be advised to divide the attachments