Book reviews

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Genetic Diseases of the Skin

By V M Der Kaloustian and A K Kurban.
(Pp xv + 339; figures + tables. DM 178,
US \$97.90). Berlin, Heidelberg, New York:
Springer-Verlag. 1979.

There is at present no really comprehensive, up to date, postgraduate text book of hereditary skin disorders, and this book therefore fills an important need. After a brief introductory chapter on the principles of human genetics, subsequent chapters are concerned with groups of skin disorders associated under particular morphological criteria, such as abnormalities of keratinisation and pigmentation, bullous eruptions, hyperplasias, disorders associated with photosensitivity, and so on. There are also chapters on disorders of connective tissue, hair, and nails and a variety of other conditions in which dermatological abnormalities feature predominantly. There are separate chapters on chromosomal anomalies and dermatoglyphs. For each disorder there is a clinical description, followed by brief notes on pathology and pathophysiology, inheritance, and treatment, and a list of up to date key references. A feature likely to be particularly helpful is a concluding appendix of the differential diagnoses of disorders based on dermatological signs. There is also a helpful glossary of terms and a very full index.

Hereditary skin disorders still remain largely the province of the morphologist, for the biochemical basis of the vast majority is still unknown. In a book which is to be a reference work in this field it is therefore essential that the illustrations be of an exceptionally high quality if they are to be helpful in diagnosis. From this point of view the illustrations in this book are no disappointment and are of first rate quality. Most are from the authors' own collections. However, an understandable problem arises in books such as this, in that in an attempt to make particular diagnostic points clear there is a tendency to concentrate on classical text book examples. In fact, one rarely sees these in practice and the dilemma for the geneticist is often in having to make a positive diagnosis in a *forme fruste*.

Carefully chosen illustrative examples of such mild cases could have been particularly helpful, for example in adenoma sebaceum and neurofibromatosis. Perhaps, in the same vein, one might have hoped for a little more on carrier detection in X linked disorders, again an important problem for the

clinical geneticist; for example, the value of sweat pore counts in carriers of X linked anhidrotic ectodermal dysplasia and cellular mosaicism for α -galactosidase activity in angiokeratoma corporis diffusum, though admittedly in both these cases references are given to detailed documentation of the problem.

Clearly this will deservedly become the standard text on genodermatology because it is authoritative and comprehensive and also because of the excellent production. I would recommend it most strongly to all concerned with the field.

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Reproduction

British Medical Bulletin, vol 35, No 2.
Scientific Editor, R V Short. (Pp 111; figures +
tables. £5.00.) London: The British Council. 1979.

This issue is well up to the high standard established by the British Medical Bulletin, as would be expected from the list of the contributors. The broad title 'Reproduction' is perhaps a little misleading, for the volume does not cover its social and behavioural connotations but is more specifically concerned with reproductive biology. Within this field the contributions range quite widely. In his introduction Professor R V Short, the Scientific Editor, stresses the fascinations of reproductive biology, with its enormous practical applications and particularly in the regulation of the world's human population. He points out that it is already too late to avert overpopulation, and all that can be done is to alleviate the attendant suffering and attempt to treat the disorder. He calls for a new generation of contraceptives, dismisses the hope that new, more efficient forms with fewer adverse effects can be developed from existing knowledge, and points out that the impetus for such development is already on the way out.

Of particular relevance to readers of this journal will be the first four papers on regulation of meiosis in mammalian oocytes, in vitro fertilisation, control of early development, and sex determination and differentiation, together with a later paper on the chromosomal basis of human infertility. Moor and Warnes show how great have been the advances during the last two or three years in knowledge of the mechanisms that initiate meiosis. In the primordial