Childs. Their summary opinions are based on surveys of Canadian and US medical schools. The problems of teaching human genetics as a basic science course and medical genetics as a clinical course are pointed out. Deficiencies in adequate faculty for such teaching is a major problem. 'Investigation of Genetic Linkage in Human Families' by R White and J-M Lalouel fails to capture much of the current excitement in mapping the human genome. The emphasis is on molecular mechanisms in micro-organisms and human gene mapping is relegated to a secondary position at the end of the review.

THADDEUS E KELLY

Prenatal Diagnosis of Heritable Skin Diseases

Edited by T Gedde-Dahl Jr and K D Wuepper. (Pp 216; £99.10.) Basel: Karger. 1987.

This book is number 16 of the series 'Current Problems in Dermatology'. This lengthening list of problems explains the worried look on the face of your local dermatologist, but this book should at least relieve the worry caused by ignorance of prenatal diagnosis. The 16 chapters are based on selected, clinically orientated papers from two meetings held in October 1985 and February 1986, demonstrating commendable speed on the part of the authors and publishers. Volume 17 of the series is promised to give the contributions on biological aspects of heritable skin diseases.

The chapters are divided into four sections covering methods of prenatal diagnosis, the genetic background, expression of fetal markers, and diagnosis of specific disorders. There is a clear, detailed, but practical description of the use of fetoscopy for fetal skin sampling, and critiques of the technique of chorionic villus sampling. The description of the potential of recombinant DNA techniques is exciting and the rate of advance in this field is dramatically demonstrated by the eight page reference human gene map of genes important for or expressed in the skin. Shafts of light are spread on the human periderm, and Holbrook *et al* shook me out of my complacent assumption that skin structure gradually and slowly evolves throughout gestation, by demonstrating coordinated expression of markers of adult skin at an early developmental stage. In the final section on diagnosis, the chapters on epidermolysis bullosa are well illustrated and detailed, but there is inevitably some overlap. Disorders of collagen synthesis, Menkes' syndrome, and a range of immunodeficiency diseases may now be diagnosed in utero and are well reviewed.

I was particularly interested in the 'mutagenic hypersensitivity syndromes', including for example xeroderma pigmentosum, for which reliable methods of prenatal diagnosis are now available. A surprising omission in the chapter on epidermal disorders was steroid sulphatase deficiency and linked ichthyosis, though this was briefly mentioned earlier in the book.

Although this is undoubtedly a useful reference book, it is clearly not a textbook of the subject area and there is inevitably an uneven coverage of subjects. Epidermolysis bullosa, for example, given 28 pages, but the ichthyoses only nine. Ataxia telangiectasia is treated in an overlapping manner by two different authors within a few pages of each other.

The book is aimed at the clinical geneticists, obstetricians dealing with prenatal diagnosis, and that small (in Britain) band of paediatric dermatologists. Karger have given this book a fussy, non-reflective, bilious, yellow cover, which feels slightly dated and put me off. But to be fair, the paper quality, print quality, and clarity of illustrations are all excellent. Both clinical geneticists and dermatologists should have this book.

A Y FINLAY

The Correspondence of Charles Darwin

Volumes 1 and 2. Edited by F Burkhardt and S Smith. (Pp 603; £30.00.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1987.

Few things give such an insight into a person's character as their correspondence, especially in Victorian times, when letters were the only form of distant communication, and one which was a major occupation for members of the educated and leisured classes. Many of Charles Darwin's letters have been collected and published already and have formed a familiar companion to such works as *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *The Origin of Species*.

This collection represents an undertaking on a completely different scale and aims to bring together all letters to Darwin as well as those from him, in a carefully edited framework. Volumes 1 and 2 take us only to 1843, but contain what must be the most interesting material in personal terms, as well as much of scientific interest.

The greater part of volume 1 is occupied by correspondence during the Beagle voyage; it is a delight to read, giving a most vivid picture of the enthusiasm and growing skills of the young naturalist and providing a remarkable insight into the development of one of the pivotal figures in