Book Reviews

Humangenetik. Ein Kurzes Handbuch in fünf Bänden. Band IV. Edited by P. E. BECKER. (Pp. xx + 556; 384 figures. DM 174.) (Subscription price DM 139.20 if ordering all volumes.) Stuttgart: Georg Thieme. 1964.

This, the second volume of this encyclopaedia to appear, is devoted to the sense organs. A section on the eye, contributed by D. Klein and A. Franceschetti of Geneva, runs to 207 pages which carry 250 illustrations, some in colour, and a bibliography of some 40 pages containing about 2,500 references. A section by M. Schwarz of Tübingen and the Editor deals with the ear, nose, and throat in 88 pages; this, too, with 62 illustrations and some 500 references, is well documented. The third and concluding section deals with the skin and its appendages and is contributed by F. Vogel of Heidelberg and H. Dorn of Berlin; it contains 160 pages, some 2,000 references and 92 illustrations.

Each of these three sections is adequate and well organized. The accounts they give are all the more useful as recent work is well covered, though this in many instances reduces the text to classified lists as very little information is available on the more recently recognized affections. In the section on the eye, the accounts of the classical affections are excellent, and the two concluding chapters on metabolic disorders and neuro-ophthalmological syndromes other than the typical lipoidoses are particularly helpful; one would have welcomed elsewhere in the text a clearer distinction between the disorders of a purely local type and those with associated generalized disturbances. In the section on the ear, both deaf-mutism and otosclerosis are well described, while the chapters on syndromes with congenital deafness and on voice and speech are most helpful. The section that breaks most new ground in classification is the one on the skin. A clear distinction is made between generalized dysplasias and dystrophies as opposed to localized disturbances of these types, and the mass of hereditary affections are clearly described in subdivisions of these major groupings. In addition, two relatively small sections on naevi and tumours take in what is not readily covered by this classification. Altogether this is a welcome volume.

A. S.

The Matter of Mendelian Heredity. By K. R. LEWIS and B. JOHN. (Pp. 269; 53 figures + 15 plates + 37 tables; 40s.) London: J. and A. Churchill. 1964.

This book is intended as a supplement to textbooks of general genetics for use in advanced school courses and at the undergraduate level. It is unorthodox in that the emphasis is on ideas rather than facts and its avowed object is to stimulate thought in student and teacher alike, rather than to encourage prodigious feats of memorization prior to examinations.

Medical and human genetics have unfortunately become divorced to some extent from the main stream of genetical knowledge. This is due partly to the different methodology imposed by the impossibility of experimental breeding in man and partly to differences of training in medicine and biology. Thus this book, which almost completely eschews the anthropocentric approach, will undoubtedly contain much that is new and stimulating to workers in medical genetics. There are eight chapters in all, covering, for example, such topics as the genetic system, evolution, and the relation of Mendelian heredity to mechanisms of reproduction. Two of the chapters deal with subjects of great practical importance, elementary statistical methods and the preparation of chromosomes for examination. The chemical basis of heredity is relegated to a brief chapter towards the end of the book since the authors feel that 'an understanding of the biological significance of the Mendelian discovery' is of more importance than the knowledge of 'the detailed structure of a molecule – even the DNA molecule'. The last chapter is devoted to a short discussion of scientific method.

In pursuance of its aim of stimulating thought, this book is written in a style which is always forceful, often informal, and sometimes frankly jocular. There are many excellent, mostly original, figures and plates, many of which illustrate chromosomes and their behaviour. There is a relatively large number of trivial mistakes in spelling, which will doubtless be remedied in future editions.

G. R. FRASER

An Introduction to Medical Genetics, 3rd ed. By J. A. FRASER ROBERTS. (Pp. xiii + 283; 121 figures. 35s.) London: Oxford University Press. 1963.

This is the third edition of the book that has established itself as the best introduction to genetics for present and future medical practioners. The book was original in that all the examples and illustrations were taken from medicine. It was lucid, exact and did not cover more than was appropriate for an introduction. These qualities have been preserved in the third edition. The startling new advances have been kept in perspective. Chromosome abnormalities, which have considerable clinical importance, have now been allotted one of the twelve chapters. The first chapter on chromo-