Book reviews

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Ir Genes. Past, Present, and Future
Edited by C W Pierce, S E Cullen, J A Kapp, B D Schwartz, and D C Shreffler. (Pp xxvi + 261; figures + tables. £56-00.) Clifton, New Jersey: Humana Press. 1983.

This collection of manuscripts is based on presentations to the 5th Ir Gene Workshop held in August 1982. A total of 240 scientists attended the meeting and the 85 contributions printed here present the potential reviewer with an impossible task. I must confess that I have an aversion to these publications, especially when they are in hard covers and embossed with a somewhat misleading title. The reader might expect to find here at least one ‘overview’ article covering the background to Ir genes up to August 1982, and perhaps a detached assessment of the plethora of detail presented in these 600 pages. He will, I fear, be disappointed. This is pure Workshop material intended for the cogniscenti (whether or not they attended the meeting) and no allowance whatever is made for the non-initiated outsider. The final contribution “Where From Here?” by Jan Klein and Zoltan Nagy does attempt to summarise briefly the state of our knowledge about Ir genes and lists the areas where much more work is still required. I would have preferred to see this section expanded to give a much more wide-ranging evaluation of the field.

Predictably this volume is heavily biased towards the laboratory mouse and there is only a tiny amount of space devoted to human Ia antigens. This is, of course, a true reflection of the partition of effort in this area but, inevitably, it does make this volume of much less interest to readers of this journal.

M W Turner

Genetics of Cardiovascular Disease

This volume of Progress in Medical Genetics consists of eight chapters entirely devoted to cardiovascular topics. It is a valuable volume covering an area which has received somewhat less attention than the frequency and importance of the disorders warrant. One hopes that cardiologists and epidemiologists in the field of heart disease will read it, in addition to medical geneticists. The contributions fall into two groups. Four of the chapters, those on coronary heart disease by Berg, congenital heart disease by the Noras, connective tissue disorders by Peyeritz, and syndromal associations by Schinzel, are detailed and extensive reviews of their topics, which form up-to-date and authoritative statements of our current knowledge. The other four chapters are brief reviews of areas in which there is, for the most part, less information and as a result these make somewhat less satisfactory reading.

The chapter on coronary heart disease concentrates on the lipoproteins, but sadly was written before any of the recent evidence on localisation of the genes concerned and the application of new molecular techniques became available. Despite this, the chapter is a most valuable and detailed account of the lipoproteins and their disorders as they affect coronary heart disease.

Of the two chapters on congenital heart disease, that by Schinzel dealing with syndromal aspects gives most new information and is particularly thorough in its assessment of the different types of cardiovascular disease seen in specific chromosomal disorders. Mendelian and possible teratogenic syndromes are also well reviewed, and the overall importance of looking carefully for syndromal features is something which anyone dealing with diagnosis or counselling in congenital heart disease should be aware of.

The chapter by the Noras also stresses the likely importance of teratogens and gives a clear guide to counselling risks in the various congenital heart disorders.

The chapter on heritable disorders of connective tissue can almost be seen as an extension of McKusick’s book on the subject, with valuable detailed accounts of the specific problems in both the structural connective tissue disorders, such as Marfan syndrome, and in the various inborn errors of metabolism, such as the mucopolysaccharidosis. Again, there are many useful points here concerning management in addition to diagnostic and genetic aspects.

Among the shorter chapters, the review of hypertension, while valuable, shows how far we still have to go to identify the specific genetic factors involved, while those on mitral valve prolapse and
cardiomyopathies are rather more superficial. The repeated reference in the former chapter to ‘Berger’ muscular dystrophy suggests little personal familiarity with genetic disorders.

Taken as a whole this is a book with a lot of valuable information in it, in keeping with the high standard always set by this series.

The publishers may wish to note two points. Firstly, the type setting is associated with a gross excess of hyphenation, which I have noticed in previous books produced by the same publisher. The use of automated typesetting techniques is no excuse for such an irritating fault. Secondly, the price is £52 which will severely limit the number of people purchasing this book and many libraries will decline to take it in these economically difficult times.

If the publishers really wish the book to sell they should have faith in their editors and contributors and produce it at a lower price for a wider audience. This series is too important to be relegated to obscurity by being priced out of the market.

Peter S Harper

A Colour Atlas of Clinical Genetics

This compact volume contains an abundance of excellent illustrations in a well designed format, placing emphasis on clinical photographs rather than descriptive text.

In the first five chapters the basic principles of genetics are described in a simple way for those not primarily involved in clinical genetics. Chapters 6 and 7 cover chromosome disorders and dysmorphic syndromes, while the remaining 12 chapters deal with disorders of particular systems, such as bone dysplasias, eye, skin, neurological, and muscle disorders.

Throughout the book the text highlights key features and the inheritance pattern of each disorder and many classification tables are included. A particularly useful practical guide to risk estimation and counselling in congenital deafness is given in chapter 9.

This book is a most helpful addition to current publications on syndrome identification, bringing together extensive experience of both rare and common disorders. It will be of value not only to geneticists and paediatricians, but also to obstetricians, general practitioners, students, and nurses. It is small enough to carry around easily and should be available in all out-patient clinics where these types of disorders are encountered, as well as paediatric and maternity wards, where it will provide a most useful source to aid diagnosis.

Helen M Kingston

Developments in Human Reproduction and their Eugenic and Ethical Implications

It is curious that, judging by exposure in the media, developments in human reproduction and the ‘new genetics’ appear to generate more controversy and debate than issues such as global starvation and the prospect of nuclear annihilation, which would seem to be much more pressing. Yet it is a fact that much of society is more preoccupied with the possible problems of tomorrow than with those facing it today, so it is appropriate that these Proceedings of the 19th Annual Symposium of the Eugenics Society should be published in this well produced, relatively inexpensive, and highly readable volume.

The papers presented fall roughly into three groups. The first deals with the physiological and technological aspects of contraception, AID, in vitro fertilisation, and in vitro culture. All of these papers recognise the ethical difficulties and the Galton Lecture by Dr Edwards is particularly thoughtful. The second group relates to clinical genetics in its wider sense as it impinges upon the fetus, society, and the extended family. The concluding papers deal directly with the eugenic, ethical, and tangled legal implications of the new technology and its application.

This book is both instructive and stimulating and should do much to dispel the unfounded anxieties and misconceptions of those who fear that we are on the brink of a Brave New World. It can be readily recommended to all those concerned with the broader implications of medical genetics.

I D Young

Hypermobility of Joints

This little book of 170 pages ranges widely over the whole field of diseases, disorders, and disasters that may lead to an unusual degree of joint mobility, from Charcot’s joints through rheumatoid arthritis, traumatic rupture of ligaments, and various genetic disorders, to simple double jointedness. It is written