pigmentosa. These proceedings are divided into a number of sections, including clinical aspects, tests of visual function, molecular genetics, biochemistry, morphology, immunology, and lipid metabolism, and each section contains papers that provide an up to date account of the present state of our knowledge. The book addresses a wide readership because of the scope of the topics which have been included and, in addition to those involved in research into retinitis pigmentosa, clinical geneticists and ophthalmologists will find much to interest them here. The multidisciplinary approach, so important to research today, has been presented by a group of acknowledged experts, and the reader should welcome the opportunity to savour the work presented by those in other disciplines. Since much of the work presented is that of workers whose native language is not English, the reader is sometimes obliged to make a small effort to follow what has been written. There are a few, and these are very few, lapses in the editing, for example, RLPF for RFLP, but the standard of editing is, on the whole, high. The editors are to be congratulated on the efficiency with which they have collated this book, which is recommended to all those interested in inherited disorders of the eye.

Marcelle Jay

Fetal Diagnosis of Genetic Defects

This book on prenatal diagnosis is intended primarily for obstetricians. It covers the recent growth areas such as chorion villus sampling, diagnostic DNA analysis, ultrasound diagnosis of structural defects, and the use of maternal alpha fetoprotein in refining Down’s syndrome screening. There are also useful chapters on malformation in twins, the management of the prenatal diagnosis patient, and the prospects for preimplantation diagnosis. All the contributors are acknowledged experts.

Despite its 1987 date, the book is reasonably up to date. If it were being rewritten now there would be more on the polymerase chain reaction, the Duchenne muscular dystrophy gene deletions, and the associations with cystic fibrosis shown by the more recent probes. Few of the chapters contradict one another, the most obvious exception being the recommendation by Nicolaides and Campbell that amniocentesis is unjustified in the exclusion of neural tube defects where the prior risk is increased by a raised maternal serum AFP or family history. Wald and Cuckle disagree, and perhaps an editorial comment would have been helpful.

For obstetricians, the book can be strongly recommended as an authoritative update on this important area of practice. They will need to bear in mind that some of it will quickly become out of date.

For clinical geneticists the combination of closely packed information, most of which is already familiar, makes for rather arduous reading and I think few of them will want to buy it. If they do, they will be glad of the references, which are numerous, and many of which relate to items of clinical wisdom often taken for granted.

N R Dennis

The Prevention and Avoidance of Genetic Disease

This book is the written version of a conference organised by the Editors at The Royal Society in April 1987. A series of eminent speakers give ‘state of the art’ reviews of a range of fields relevant to the title.

The Editors are anxious not to confuse prevention with avoidance and, accordingly, three of the contributors discuss the problems of measuring and controlling mutation rates, giving the book a broader base than many treatments of the ‘prevention’ of genetic disorders. Other recurring themes are the feasibility and potential utility of a complete map of the human genome, and the exploration of techniques and approaches for bridging differences of scale, from visible chromosome deletion to invisible megabase deletion and from kilobase to megabase molecular mapping.

The sense of excitement at the molecular tools available is tempered by some level headed accounts from Edwards, Weatherall, and Bobrow of the limits to prevention and avoidance imposed by fresh mutations, molecular heterogeneity, and doctors’ and patients’ perceptions of disease burden.

‘Multifactorial’ diseases and chromosome abnormalities receive rather fleeting mention. Mikkelsen’s chapter on Down’s syndrome was written too early to include a discussion of maternal HCG and oestril levels, but otherwise says all that can be said until more is known about the causes of non-disjunction. Strategies for the identification of individual genes involved in ‘multifactorial’ disorders could have furnished a useful chapter.