retrieval, however, it has some fairly obvious limitations and it compares rather unfavourably both with computerised retrieval systems, some of which are far more flexible and efficient, and in some respects with specialised books that contain extensive bibliographies.

S H ROBERTS

Molecular Genetics in Diseases of Brain, Nerve and Muscle. Ed L P Rowland, D S Wood, E A Schon, S DiMauro. (Pp 481; £45.00.) Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1989.

This book is arranged in four sections. The first is a brief introduction to inheritance, and to the impact of molecular genetics on the field of neurological and neuromuscular disorders. The second section, more than one third of the book, describes the language and tools of molecular genetics. The third section, half the book, consists of chapters from distinguished research workers outlining their fields of work and describing their own recent contributions. The final section looks to the future, with discussions of gene therapy and of the ethical issues thrown up by the advances in molecular genetics.

The second section is designed as a primer of molecular genetics. I found it to be a succinct outline of the field that would serve as a refresher to those whose acquaintance with genetics had slipped, but it would be difficult to use it as a primer for the completely uninitiated. The density of information is necessarily too great for it to be digestible as a primer, and some topics are touched upon only sketchily. This is inevitable, given the constraints of space, but it has prevented the editors from realising their stated aim. To cover all of genetics from the structure of DNA, through gene expression, DNA polymorphisms, library construction and analysis, and on to linkage analysis in just 170 pages is perhaps not possible. The quality of the contributions is generally high, and the editors have obviously taken great care to ensure that the techniques mentioned later in the volume are described here.

The third section is the heart of the book, and covers many inherited neurological disorders: for only some

of these disorders has the corresponding gene product been identified. Each chapter describes the clinical disorder briefly, outlines the state of molecular knowledge, and then describes in more detail the work undertaken by the author(s). As a set of summaries of genetic knowledge (in most cases, as of early 1987) these are well written and will remain of interest for some time. What makes the volume exciting, however, is the description of the contributors' own work. In some chapters this is not emphasised, but I most enjoyed reading the accounts of work in progress or recently completed. The chapters describing genes whose product is known were generally longer and of more interest to me than were the others. The chapter on familial amyloidotic polyneuropathies, for example, was a lucid synthesis of molecular genetics, protein chemistry, and immunocytochemistry. The descriptions of some of the other disorders, those of unknown gene product, are perhaps less likely to retain their appeal. This is only to be expected, with the waning of the age of genetic linkage studies: a similar book in the future will have many fewer diseases in which the gene product remains unknown, or the gene locus uncertain.

I would warmly recommend this book to medical geneticists whose knowledge of scientific neurology warrants updating, and to neurologists and other clinicians interested in the genetic basis of neurological disorders. However, I would suggest some preliminary reading of elementary molecular genetics for those with little previous exposure. Medical students with an interest in the field, and hopefully with some background in molecular genetics, might also find some of the essays to be suitable general background reading.

ANGUS CLARKE

International Directory of Genetic Services. 9th edition. Henry T Lynch, Rodney H Hoden. (Pp 74.) New York: March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation. 1990.

This well known Directory was first published in 1968 to assist with medical communication in the field of birth defects. Specifically, it was envisaged

that it would aid research by allowing identification of cognate researchers in other centres and also with the provision of counselling to distant branches of a family, particularly where they were resident in another country. The current edition contains information on 873 genetics units, but while this statistic is impressive, it serves to highlight marked deficiencies in genetic services in many countries. Of the 873 entries, 476 relate to centres in the USA and the remainder are distributed among 50 other countries with strikingly only four entries for the African continent and only a single entry for China. This imbalance might reflect a degree of underascertainment and this is in evidence for the UK where seven Regional Genetic Centres are not included, but I suspect the main problem is the apparent lack of genetic services in many countries throughout the world. Successive editions of this Directory will thus be required as this shortfall is remedied and I believe that we can all play a role in helping to make the Directory comprehensive by indicating omissions and duplications to the editors. It would also be helpful to have Fax numbers for the centres and I wonder if the option of supplying information on a computer disc would be worthwhile, particularly as the number of centres throughout the world expands.

The editors are thus to be commended for taking on this task which is of benefit to all of us who are involved in both research and service aspects of genetics. Copies of this new edition are available directly from the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation for a small fee which covers packaging and transportation.

J M CONNOR

Fanconi Anaemia: Clinical, Cytogenetic and Experimental Aspects. Ed T M Schroeder-Kurth, A D Auerbach, G Ober. (Pp 264.) Berlin: Springer Verlag. 1990.

The cover of this compact hard back volume describes it as "the first attempt to gather information on all aspects of Fanconi anaemia in one source." The cover also describes the book as a monograph which suggests an unusual interpretation of this term in view of the inclusion of 57 contributors. The