

Book Reviews

Medical Microbiology. A Guide to Microbial Infections: Pathogenesis, Immunity, Laboratory Diagnosis and Control. D. GREENWOOD, R. SLACK & JOHN PEUTHERER, eds. Pp. 850 + 278 ills. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone; 1992. £24.95.

'Mackie and McCartney' was one of the classic textbooks of microbiology that progressively lost its way through the 1970s. The removal of the theoretical material into a separate volume with little coherent organization and the retention of much out-of-date information resulted in a decline in its use by students and microbiologists. Whilst the current offering is referred to as the 14th edition, it looks and reads like a new book. The editorial team is new, as well as many of the contributors, and this shows in the finished product. The editors aim the work at the interested medical student and the newer graduate recruit to medical microbiology.

The 800-page book is split into six sections as follows: microbial biology, infection and immunity, bacterial pathogens, viral pathogens, fungi and parasites and a short section on diagnosis, treatment and control of infection.

A section on microbial biology is both expected and traditional in textbooks of medical microbiology. Many such sections make rather dull reading for students. This one generally is not as an attempt at bringing up-to-date information into the chapter has been made, and a good layout with a style of text that is easy to read is used. The chapters on disinfectants, antimicrobial agents and pathogenicity are succinct but interesting. The section lacks detail for the undergraduates taking science degrees and the inclusion of some basic microbial biochemistry and genetic techniques such as PCR and gene cloning would strengthen the book greatly.

The section on infection and immunity is substantial (100 pages), detailed and well written. Then comes the meat of the book, namely the systematic bacteriology and virology sections. The editors have adopted a conventional organism- rather than systems-based organization for the chapters. Each chapter is well organized under clear headings with a fixed order and the editors are to be congratulated on keeping the many authors to this arrangement. As with all multi-author works there is some variation in content and style between chapters, but generally the standard is high. The chapter on environmental mycobacteria is short (the same length as the *Bacillus* chapter) and makes no reference to molecular techniques for identification and typing with but passing reference to patients with AIDS. The virology section is extremely readable, being brief but authoritative and benefits greatly from the many excellent line drawings, photographs and diagrams which most of the bacteriology chapters, with the exception of that on campylobacter, lack. The section on fungi is concise but informative, whereas that for parasitology lacks detail and is short, as much space is taken by large half-tone illustrations. The final section entitled 'Diagnosis, treatment and control of infection' contains a number of chapters which give information which is spread amongst different texts and is, therefore, not readily accessible to the student. The immunization chapter unfortunately makes no mention of the introduction of Hib vaccination in the UK and is, therefore, out of date immediately. The editors have chosen to give recommended reading lists rather than references. This is a pity as short lists of key primary source publications with the best two or three review articles/chapters highlighted takes no more space and would greatly increase the book's value to the trainee microbiologist.

In summary, this reasonably-priced, introductory textbook, which has good coverage of a wide range of aspects of microbiology, will be a useful source book to the interested student and graduates beginning a specialist training in microbiology.

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