higher quality illustrations and some revamping of parts of the text.

G KONDRATOWICZ


The publication of the third edition of “Cowan and Steel,” almost 20 years after the last, is like the return of a very dear, old friend. Despite everything that has happened, the friend is at heart just the same—the mission “to help those who have isolated a bacterium (from a “medicals” source) and want to identify it”.

The book begins with five general chapters on classification and nomenclature; culture media (with Frau Hesse still in her rightful place); isolation techniques; characterisation; and identification. I found the relative dismissal of the antibiogram as an aid to identification unsuitable, and would have liked to have more on the perils of over-reliance on kits. I believe, however, that the warning to the medical microbiologists of the future that the “materials and methods” section is simply to be taken from the refrigerator or shelf as kits” may be a fool’s paradise is timely.

The essence of the book for the DIY enthusiast is to be found in chapters 6 and 7 in which all the major medical bacteria are considered in the familiar series of first, second, and third table stages. Of course they are longer than before; there are, for example, over 26 staphylococcal species compared with eight last time. It seemed to me that a potential inconsistency which the authors challenge us to find concerns motility in Enterococcus faecium. On page 26 it is implied that many strains of E faecium are motile. Table 6.3b has E faecium non-motile (up to 15% possibly motile according to the key to the table), but E caeseliferus and E gallinarum motile. On page 66 they refer to E faecium “with its five varieties”. What are the facts please?

The authors continue a tradition of not being afraid to be different. They have not really given up much in relation to Klebsiella (the little essay on the genus is of great fun) and hang on to Acinetobacter baetrii. Tables 7.5 and 7.6 are masterpieces of active speciation, being not quite up to date. However, they could have been a little more daring with the old Bacteroides genus, and Mobilis does not fare well. Overall, however, most of the organisms that turn up in a medical laboratory find a home here, even if only among such taxonomic evasions as “A few organisms difficult to identify”.

The Appendices are far from incidental and contain a great deal of valuable information on media and stains, characterisation tests and test organisms (all useful ammunition for current European discussions on standardisation), and on information processing. There are three sections on the bacteriological law in relation to taxonomy, and finally a useful glossary. There are almost 50 pages of references.

This book is very definitely a must for anyone who calls him or herself a microbiologist, whether clinical, medical, or technological in persuasion.

IAN PHILLIPS


This monograph is the production of the International Programme on Chemical Safety—a joint venture of the United Nations Environmental Programme, the International Labour Organisation, and the World Health Organisation. As the title suggests it is primarily concerned with all aspects of safety testing for chemicals and is not primarily a medical text. Over half the monograph is devoted to a more comprehensive review of the organisational requirements for the quality assurance of such testing, with the remaining text specifically concerned with the quality management of toxicity studies (on animals) and of environmental monitoring studies including those on humans). Any pathologist who has prepared for laboratory accreditation will recognise much of the terminology used—SOPs (Standard Operating Procedure), QAP (Quality Assurance Programme), and there may be an experience of déjà vu from other acronyms such as MAD (Maximum Allowable Deviation). Overall, however, this monograph is aimed at the clinical pathologist; rather it is aimed at the environmental scientist seeking an organisational structure.

MD PENNEY


Until a few years ago, flow cytometers were found in dedicated laboratories. Most of them were definitely “user unfriendly” and demanded the attention of a specialist. The modern bench-top instruments are designed for use by the non-specialist. These machines cannot sort cells and will not perform the same range of sophisticated analyses as their larger parents but they will carry out, quickly and efficiently, 90% or more of the analyses required by most laboratories. Such bench-top machines hugely outnumber the larger versions and are to be found in a wide variety of research, clinical, and other workplaces.

Although these instruments are relatively easy to use, the worker still needs to understand the technology, its applications, and how the data are to be interpreted. The growth of flow cytometry has spawned a wide variety of books but they have tended to address the aspiring expert. The only attempt to produce a short, digestible description of flow cytometry was the opening chapter of Nigel Carter and Bingo Meyer in the book which I edited a few years ago.

Alice Givan has filled the gap in the market. She has produced a simple, readable account of flow cytometry and its applications. It is a book for a new technician or student or a young clinician embarking on an MD project. It is short enough to be read in a few sittings and it covers the fundamentals of flow cytometry and its applications in a straightforward and simple manner. The book is also attractively illustrated.

Inevitably, in a short book, there are some omissions and a few mistakes. For example, there is a confusion over the definition of a “bit-map” (a way of storing data in the computer) which is equated, incorrectly, to a “dot plot” (a type of display used in flow cytometry). In general I would recommend that every laboratory with a flow cytometer should keep a copy of Alice’s book on their shelf to be handed to every novice on their first entry into the laboratory.

MG ORMEROD


Confusion is rife in both the medical and lay press as to the precise nature of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). The publication of an authoritative text on the subject is therefore apposite.

This is the sixth monograph in the “Infectious Diseases and Therapy” series edited by BE Scully and HC Neu. Sixteen authors drawn from Eire, England, and the USA have produced 12 essays on various research will find this book an invaluable and entertaining guide to interpreting the data produced by flow cytometers.

PETER A VAN DAM