

Book review

Topley and Wilson's Microbiology and Microbial Infections, 9th Edn.

Editors: L. Collier, A. Balows and M. Sussman. Arnold, London. 1998.

This edition admirably maintains the high quality of its prestigious predecessors. This text was first published in Great Britain in 1928. It has now grown to over 3800 pages in five volumes (Virology, Systemic Bacteriology, Bacterial Infections, Medical Mycology and Parasitology) plus a separate Index volume (247 pages). There are 320 authors, all experts in their field from throughout the world, however two thirds are divided evenly between the UK and the USA.

This was a tremendous undertaking even though the principal editors were assisted by volume editors. It has come a long way from the medical school textbook it once was. It is an outstanding reference manual, as witnessed by the extensive index. When put to the test with obscure subjects, it did not fail.

The review of the entire text is a difficult task, hence this reviewer was asked to comment on Volume 1, Virology. This volume, as all the others, covers the field extremely well with chapters such as: A Short History of Research on Viruses; The Origin and Evolution of Viruses; Safety in the Virology Laboratory; Emergence and Re-emergence of Viral Infections; and the usual chapters on each viral group including prions. Each chapter is written by leading scientists in the field. It is a source

of amusement to this reviewer to observe the national bias of some authors. This text is definitely a British product, with a preponderance of British authors, as might be expected in a British publication. However, the writing can be slanted in some respects. For example, Isaacs and Lindenmann are given proper respect for their discovery of interferon, but the independent contemporary work of Nagano in Japan is overlooked (admittedly, not an unusual oversight). More to the point, the early chapter on history stresses the importance of the early work on the antiviral agent methisazone against smallpox (work that is not even mentioned in the similar multi-volume text 'Encyclopedia of Virology' published in the US). Vidarabine, on the other hand, is not mentioned at all in this early chapter, whereas a later chapter co-authored by an American, states "Vidarabine was an important landmark in the development of antiviral chemotherapy." Aside from this idiosyncrasy, the volume is thorough, with information of value to readers of all levels of interest in virology and will be particularly important as a reference text. Chapters are relatively uniform despite the numerous authors, easy to read and well illustrated. Depending on one's specific interests some areas can be found lacking, but the overall quality and completeness of presentation is excellent.

Unfortunately, this tremendous work is only

available for purchase as a complete set. It is available in print or CD. The print or CD version sells for 995 British pounds, while both together sell for 1295 British pounds. This unfortunately puts it out of the range of many who would profit from having this work on their shelf. Hope-

fully the publishers will change their policy and allow volumes to be sold individually.

George J. Galasso, PhD
Associate Editor for Reviews,
Antiviral Research