

BOOK REVIEWS

Inorganic Nitrogen Metabolism: edited by W. R. ULLRICH, P. J. APARICIO; P. J. SYRETT and F. CASTILLO, 1987 Springer, Berlin, Hard cover DM148

This volume represents the proceedings of a European 'Advanced Workshop' on inorganic nitrogen metabolism held in the Spring of 1986 in the University of Extremadura, Spain, and organized by the Federation of European Societies of Plant Physiology. Having surveyed the list of contents and read some of the chapters I had begun to draft an opening paragraph for this review when I came across the editors' forward. In it they summarize with remarkable frankness the main weaknesses of this volume.

Thus we are told that the meeting was widened in scope from its original aim of covering the inorganic nitrogen metabolism of blue-green and eukaryotic algae to include "some coverage" of nitrogen fixing bacteria, and "to some extent" the biochemistry and physiology of fungi and higher plants. Again "The editors decided not to interfere with the texts of the authors", i.e. there has been no attempt at integration of the 52 contributions. Finally we are warned specifically "Not to expect a text book or monograph" and that "Even if a complete picture . . . is missing, one can find many new and so-far unpublished data in this book". Well! you can't be given fairer warning, I suppose.

One sympathises with the desire of organizers of conferences, workshops and symposia to produce a permanent (and perhaps profitable) record of the events in question, but in this case (not for the first time) one is left wondering. It would be wrong to say that the volume does not contain some interesting observations, but most

of these are, I'm afraid, no longer "New and so-far unpublished", by now most have appeared in refereed journals, usually in substantially fuller form than here. Indeed, one of the luxuries often afforded to contributors to volumes such as this, the chance to include speculative or controversial material, is here denied: rather the opposite, with many of the contributions reduced to below the minimum worthwhile space. For example, Stewart and his colleagues are allotted six pages to survey 'Comparative Aspects of Inorganic Nitrogen Metabolism in Plants', the only paper on this subject in the volume. But he is lucky; the average allocation to each of the 52 contributors is a little over four sides. Within this space authors were asked to "Present recent results from their laboratories in the context of a survey of background knowledge". Some hope! In fact what we are offered is little more than an over-elaborate book of abstracts.

A depressing volume then: time and again, after reading interesting titles of contributions by well-respected workers, turning to the articles led to frustration and disappointment, followed by a search in the library for the real thing. For the record, the contributions fall under four main headings, 'Basic Aspects' (2 contributions); 'Uptake and Metabolism of Inorganic Nitrogen' (3 contributions on eukaryotes, 3 on prokaryotes); 'Enzymes of Nitrogen Metabolism' (nitrate reductase, 8; nitrite reductase, 3, ammonium metabolism, 6; nitrogenase, 8; others, 7), and 'Regulation of Nitrogen Utilization and Special Topics' (Algae and cyanobacteria, 5, Higher Plants, 7).

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Plant Pathogenic Bacteria: edited by E. L. CIVEROLO, A. COLLMER, R. E. DAVIS and A. G. GILLASPIE, Matrinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, Netherlands. 1987, 1050 pp. £140

Fortunately, it is no longer de rigueur to publish the proceedings of every international symposium that takes place. Which is just as well, since we might well be landed with many more volumes like the one under review. It weighs 4 1/2 pounds, runs to over 1000 pages and contains over 230 contributions. These vary from symposium papers, which may be up to 10 pages long, to discussion papers (2-3 pages) and short contributions (1/2-1 page). It represents the proceedings of the VIth International Conference on Plant Pathogenic Bacteria held at College Park, Maryland in May 1985 and in spite of camera-ready copy, it has taken nearly two years to reach the book stalls.

There is of course much of interest in these proceedings. Special sessions were focussed upon *Agrobacterium*, *Erwinia*, *Pseudomonas* and fastidious prokaryotes. The papers are clustered together in the proceedings under these and other headings. The contributions are either short research papers or research abstracts so that it is difficult for the interested reader to be able to draw any clear conclusions about the current state of the art on these fashionable areas of research. Perhaps the committed plant bacteriologist will benefit from this enormous, indigestible pot-pourri of information, but there is little here for the general reader.

At the XIVth International Botanical Congress held recently in Berlin, the problem of published proceedings was simply solved by only having a book of abstracts, issued by the Organising Committee for use during the Conference. This is perhaps too drastic a solution. One