

Book Reviews

General Microbiology, 7th edition. HANS G. SCHLEGEL (Translated MARGOT KOGUT). Pp. 655. Cambridge University Press, 1993. £50 (hardcover), £19.95 (paperback).

One of my more daunting tasks is to teach introductory microbiology to a class of about 150 first year BSc Biology students. I am therefore always interested in textbooks of general microbiology which can be recommended to the students for reference or purchase. The previous (1986) edition of Schlegel's *General Microbiology* (the first edition to be translated into English) already appears on my booklist but not as the most highly recommended text. Students are currently recommended to purchase Brock and Madigan's *Biology of Microorganisms* (sixth edition).

The new edition of Schlegel has expanded from 587 to 655 pages: the number of chapters and the general format are unchanged but extra details have been inserted to bring the book up to date.

Any textbook which reaches its seventh edition has to be deemed a success. So does this new edition make it to the top of my booklist? Unfortunately it does not. Although the book is a mine of relevant information, it is, in my opinion, sorely in need of being completely redesigned. It appears to try to make a virtue of being extremely compact (12 × 18.5 cm) but this makes it very unattractive when compared with other modern texts which cost little more. Printing errors, mostly introduced since the last edition, cause confusion in places (e.g. Table 1.2) and the illustrations are cramped, gloomy and, in one case (Fig. 4.15), upside down. The print is small and no colour is used: this will not appeal to present-day students who are used to colour even in their daily newspapers. Also there is no immunology and virtually no medical microbiology in this book and these are areas in which many students have a particular interest. Emphasis is placed instead on understanding the basic biology of microorganisms: this is valuable of course and the book should certainly be available in the library and it will continue in a supporting role on my booklist.

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Diseases of Infection – An Illustrated Textbook, 2nd edition. N. R. GRIST, D. O. HO-YEN, E. WALKER, G. R. WILLIAMS. Pp. 453. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. £22.50.

There are a number of intermediate-sized textbooks in infectious diseases available in the market currently and competition amongst the publishers must really be quite fierce. This book does stand out because it has a wealth of colour photographs, tables and flow charts that illustrate a text written in informal style. One of the delightful aspects of this book is that it is obviously written by people who look after patients as it is liberally scattered with nuggets of clinical information. The text confines itself to the clinical aspects of infectious disease management. Detailed microbiological practice is absent. Chapters are broken down into infections of systems and recognized syndromes. Each disease receives a generous discussion of the aetiology and epidemiology, the clinical features and the diagnosis and the management and prognosis. Taken as a whole the book comprehensively covers the practice of infectious diseases and effortlessly conveys the exciting challenge of day-to-day clinical diagnosis.

This book will be of value primarily to medical students and trainees in infectious diseases, public health and microbiology. It is not sufficient for advanced postgraduate reference which is almost impossible in a book of this size. For the sake of balance I will outline a few of its deficiencies but it would be churlish to overcriticize a helpful textbook like this. The main

criticisms relate to important omissions of material that is becoming necessary in modern infectious disease practice. In particular the section on AIDS is all too brief and does not describe problems that we all encounter with day-to-day management. Considering the growing importance of hepatitis C infection, three short paragraphs are insufficient for this infection. Some of the suggestions regarding antibiotic treatment, particularly of pneumonia, are out of date. A great deal of the infectious disease physician's expertise relates to the use of antimicrobials and therefore a longer discussion of their use would be preferable to a simple list which is provided in one short chapter. Few of the chapters contain flow diagrams that illustrate practical management of infectious problems. One flow diagram relating to rubella in pregnancy is outstandingly good, but some of the other ones (for example that concerning the mental process of requesting a laboratory test) are fatuous and almost incomprehensible. On the other hand the tables that appear in most of the chapters are fabulously clear and useful.

Swinging the balance back to the positive, a number of chapters stand out as excellent, particularly the chapter on infection in pregnancy and neonates and also the chapter on prevention of infection which contains several useful case histories of public health management. It is quite unusual to find such good chapters as these in an undergraduate textbook.

All in all I thoroughly recommend this book to its target audience and I believe it will successfully compete with the other contributions to this genre.

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