views on the pathology of OA, its clinical manifestations and the techniques of their assessment. Many sections are brief with little detail, but give a succinct picture of current opinion, which nevertheless, would be useful for the inquiring student who wishes to get a ‘feel’ of the subject. The main thrust concerns some laboratory studies of experimental models and spontaneous disease of joints in animals to test drugs useful in the treatment of human OA. These chapters are embraced by descriptions of changes in human disease and means of clinical assessment. The former are substantial and the latter are resumés. The reports on experimental models and drug assessment are detailed and would be of interest to clinicians, who would have to take a stand on the equality of animal models and human disease.

Here, as is generally the case in articles on OA, there is no detail in the articulation of possible cause and effect. There is now an abundance of knowledge in the field of molecular biology that ought to make possible the adumbration of highly detailed hypotheses about articular cartilage and its normal and abnormal mechanisms. For those who do not like so Popperian an approach, one can turn to Kuhn: the need in OA is for a ‘revolution’ in its ‘normal science’. Whatever one’s allegiance, it is impossible not to feel that progress in the understanding of OA is at an impasse, and will so remain until there are some new conceptualisations with which to work. As well as working within current boundaries Ciba-Geigy are among the supporters of the quest for new horizons.

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According to the authors this textbook is intended both for scientists and clinicians with an interest in autoimmune rheumatic diseases. It is a little over 300 pages long and consists of eight chapters, the first two of which consider basic immunological mechanisms in rheumatic diseases. The remaining six cover systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren’s syndrome, polymyositis, scleroderma, and a ragbag consisting of overlap syndromes and the vasculitides. Chapter 1, ‘Setting the scene’, deals with basic immunology and considers possible mechanisms for the induction of autoimmunity. This chapter is largely redundant for anybody with access to even a modest library as most of the ideas and all of the figures in this section are borrowed from other standard texts. The second chapter, on the other hand, is a refreshingly up to date account of immunological diagnostic methods. Although not sufficiently detailed to be of any practical value in the laboratory, the text gives a good, brief, critical analysis of most of the assays currently in use, which could help anyone new to these methods in the interpretation of the results.

Each of the following chapters on individual diseases has two novel features which to my knowledge have not been incorporated in other similar textbooks. The first of these is to list the milestones in the history of research in the disease. The second is to include case histories (rather pretentiously called ‘case studies’) at strategic points in the text. Whereas ‘the milestones’ succeed, I found the case studies irritating, not only because they interrupt the flow of the text but also because they give an anecdotal feel to what is otherwise an objective view of the literature. The layout of the rest of these chapters is conventional, with the clinical features described first, followed by the immunopathology, with a good coverage of animal models, then a section on treatment. The clinical section is particularly well illustrated and the text kept short but very well referenced, to allow plenty of room for the immunopathology sections. The sections on treatment and management are too abbreviated to be of much use, though again they are well referenced.

The bulk of the book is concerned with the immunopathology of the rheumatic diseases. Perhaps this should have been the title as these are the sections which are written at the greatest length and with the most authority. One remarkable feature is that, although the book is the size of many multiple author textbooks, this one is written by two people only and both deserve congratulations for what must have been a gargantuan task. The two author format also means that the text is consistent in style, avoids repetition, and has a personal flavour which makes it refreshing and easy to read. It also means that there is an inevitable bias towards the research interests of the authors. For example, the chapter on SLE is 100 pages long, whereas that for rheumatoid arthritis is only 60 pages. Within the SLE chapter there is an understandable emphasis on anti-DNA antibodies and their idiotypes and relatively little on the ribonucleoprotein antigens and the importance of their recent molecular characterisation. Antihistone antibodies are hardly considered and the first description of the LE cell (now known to be due to a reaction with DNA-histone) is a surprising omission from the ‘milestone’ list. The chapter on rheumatoid arthritis has more serious gaps. These include the immunohistochemistry of the joint and the CD5 positive B cell, both important areas which are not covered; and the lymphokines, which are dismissed in a short paragraph.

Despite the omissions and the occasional slight irritation this book fills an important gap in the currently available rheumatological publications. Although it is the sort of book one would like to own, its current price of almost £40 is probably too much for most individuals. Nevertheless it deserves a place in every medical school library and in any institution with an interest in autoimmunity and rheumatology.

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