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M C Ball & A H Norbury

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A Beckett, I B Heath & D J McLaughlin

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(February) £9.95 net

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L C Beadle

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Viruses

Comprehensive Virology. Edited by Heinz Fraenkel-Conrat and Robert R. Wagner. Pp. x+191. (Plenum Press: New York and London, 1974.) \$15.00.

VOLUME 1 of this series is unquestionably comprehensive. The *Descriptive Catalogue of Viruses* lists nearly 500 animal viruses, from "Acado" to "Zika", some 350 plant viruses from "Amajari virus (renavirus)" to three viruses of protists from "A" to "ZS", (both bacteriophages of *Escherichia coli*). The descriptions range from purely taxonomic designations — "Amajari virus (arenavirus)" to three pages of detail on tobacco mosaic virus. There are a few errors, a few eccentricities, (an extra 'i' in -viridae throughout), a few omissions (such as the ephemeral fever virus), and perhaps a few mycoplasmas still masquerading as plant viruses. This is, nevertheless, a unique compilation. J. S. Porterfield

Choosing and chancing

Our Future Inheritance: Choice or Chance? A Study by A British Association Working Party. Pp. ix+141+4 plates. (Oxford University: London, October 1974.) £4.00 boards; £1.25 paper.

It has become axiomatic that science, the acquisition of knowledge, should be expected to increase the health, wealth and happiness of mankind. That would seem to apply especially to the results of studies on the various complex processes concerning reproduction, whether they be directed at stimulating fertility or curbing prolificacy.

The British Association and its panel of experts are to be congratulated on this publication. The book, though recognising the benefits accruing from advances in biomedical techniques in the field of reproduction and genetics, urges, quite rightly, that a close watch be kept on possible dangers that could arise from their application to disorders in man.

The terms AID, fertility drug, organ-transplant, test-tube baby, and genetic engineering have all become quite commonplace as a result of popular reporting in the media. The methods and results of the scientific procedures associated with these terms are presented accurately. More important is the awareness that is created of the grave consequences that could follow man's deliberate manipulation and possible interference with his own genes, gametes or gonads. The germ cells, which, strictly speaking, are not vital to the individual are well known for their greater sensitivity to environ-

mental and other changes than are somatic cells.

It is intended that the book should be widely read and it deserves to reach all classes of professional and lay people so that the significance of advances in biological sciences, and their application to human medicine, can be fully realised.

The manner of presentation of a scientific subject in a form acceptable to the lay public is problematical but the authors/editors have overcome skilfully a very difficult situation. I get the impression that the book has been presented in such a way that if members of the public who are scientifically uninformed wish to read and understand it they would obtain all that was needed from the first chapter ('Bio-medical advances: a mixed blessing?') and the last chapter ('Social concern and biological advances'). It is regrettable that those two chapters cannot be made more freely available for all to read and enjoy. The intervening chapters contain details about various technical advances and will require a fair understanding of the relevant subjects if they are to have any lasting effect and impression.

The case-bound volume is well produced and contains a useful index.

I. W. Rowlands

Exercise and sport

Science and Medicine of Exercise and Sport. Edited by Warren R. Johnson and E. R. Buskirk. Pp. 486. (Harper and Row: New York and London, 1973.) £10.00.

THIS volume is a collection of 33 chapters compiled by 40 different authors, linked by a common interest in the physiological and medical aspects of sport and exercise. Each contribution is a short review article; the subjects dealt with range from basic biochemical features of contracting muscle to the effects of exercise on the mental state of psychiatric patients. At the end of each chapter is a list of cited references. There is, however, no general index for the whole book.

I found it difficult to determine for whom the text was intended. The general non-scientific reader would find it incomprehensible. A scientist with no specialised knowledge of the subject would find the format difficult reading: it is fragmented, it lacks a theme, and it is therefore indigestible. Perhaps it would be of interest and use to a student writing a dissertation on the scientific and medical aspects of exercise and sport. Its place would therefore seem to be more appropriate to the shelves of a reference library than to a private bookcase.

R. Y. Calne