

antitumour agent particularly in the treatment of a renal tumour in children (Wilm's tumour) but it must be admitted that its clinical use is very limited and the main interest in the drug stems more from its use as a research tool to probe the mechanism of DNA-dependent RNA synthesis. This lack of balance in the text is also apparent elsewhere. Thus for gougerotin, a drug of little or no use clinically and poorly characterised biochemically, the short description does tell us that the antibiotic inhibits protein synthesis by preventing transfer of amino acids from aminoacyl-tRNA into polypeptide. In contrast, although penicillin was the first antibiotic to be discovered and used and still remains unrivalled for treatment of bacterial infections in general, we are told nothing concerning its mode of action involving interference with the correct assembly of bacterial cell walls and the reference list provided is brief, particularly in relation to that cited for actinomycin D. In short a reader who wishes to refer to a given antibiotic in this volume may or may not find the information he seeks.

Despite these rather specific criticisms, which I am of the opinion do cause an unfortunate lack of consistency in the coverage of the drugs selected, the volume has been compiled with great care and the

presentation is very clear. The names listed are often splendid with such gems as jolipeptin, kuwaitimycin, bramycin and virginiamycin to name but a few. What a disappointment to find 305 drugs called simply antibiotic, the name accompanied by letters or numbers or both. Perhaps in some cases the original (exotic) Japanese nomenclature has no corresponding English equivalent. It is fascinating to flip through the pages of this encyclopaedia and note the vast structural variety and complexity illustrated by the antibiotics selected. This aspect is surely the strength of the encyclopaedia as a reference book and having examined some of the structures depicted in detail I for one am anxious to obtain many of these compounds with a view to carrying out further biochemical analysis. Such studies must surely give a wealth of information concerning structure-function relationships in the antibiotic field and it may be that a future massive volume compiled by the present author could incorporate many remarkable but hitherto undiscovered facts concerning the modes of inhibitory action of many of the compounds presently listed.

Michael Cannon

Handbook of Intermediary Metabolism of Aromatic Compounds

by B. L. Goodwin
Chapman and Hall; London, 1976
ix + 785 pages. £30.00

The metabolism of aromatic compounds is of considerable intrinsic interest and importance since the metabolic reactions include the biosynthesis or degradation of a variety of different biologically important compounds, such as the aromatic amino acids, some hormones particularly catecholamines and thyroxine, and foreign compounds, including many drugs and carcinogens. Although there are a number of excellent reviews covering these topics, this comprehensive treatise is a useful reference book, which can be used readily as a guide to the original literature on the inter-

mediary metabolism of aromatic compounds.

The book is divided into two sections. Part I (137 pages) covers briefly the main reactions and enzymes, grouped together under convenient headings such as 'Reactions involving the formation and degradation of the aromatic nucleus and other ring systems' and 'Formation and degradation of side-chains'. In part II (648 pages), some 7000 aromatic compounds are listed alphabetically with information about their precursors and/or degradation products. In the latter case, the species in which the relevant reactions have been

reported are also given with references to the original literature. By looking up the precursor one can in turn obtain similar information about the biosynthetic reaction or pathway. This arrangement of the subject matter is convenient and easy to use.

As a reference work this compendium should find

a place in libraries catering for research workers interested in the biochemistry of aromatic compounds and in related biological and medical aspects of metabolism and metabolic disorders, hormones, carcinogens and drug action.

H. R. V. Arnstein

BOOK LIST No. 10 January 1978

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