

## BOOK REVIEW

Flavonoids in Biology and Medicine III  
Current Issues in Flavonoids Research  
Editor N.P. Das

There seems to be fairly general agreement that there are too many meetings and more and more of these meetings yield a 'book of the meeting' recording the proceedings. It must come as a mighty relief to the regulars on the conference circuit when they are invited to talk at a meeting and *not* obliged to produce yet another manuscript. Far too many of such books have little value as useful repositories of knowledge and have been produced for the wrong reasons: to please sponsors; to inflate lists of publications of the editors; because one is expected to do so. Similarly, the contributors often produce manuscripts for publication in the proceedings for the wrong reasons: because they were obliged to if they wanted their travel expenses paid; as a favour to the editor; to inflate their lists of publications. In this way it is possible to have assembled a collection of papers that were dashed off to meet an obligation and are merely brief rehashes of papers published elsewhere (perhaps in another volume of proceedings) or papers that would be unacceptable in a peer-reviewed journal. Most of the sound data will already have been published because nobody wants to jeopardise acceptance of a paper in a 'proper' journal by publishing new data in a mere proceedings book. The best we can expect of such books, therefore, is that they offer a collection of reviews, mini-reviews or extended papers where the authors are allowed to expound their views at greater length than is normally possible in a regular journal. The book then becomes a unique and valuable collection of papers, often on a single subject but from diverse viewpoints and is useful as a primary reference source. This aim is certainly achievable and one thinks of the books of the Ciba Foundation Symposia series as models of their kind. The recipe for success in those books seems to be: a limited number of carefully selected participants; a recognition by the participants that the published proceedings are well respected and that therefore it is worth putting some effort into producing a paper; an edited record of the discussions; high production values including firm editing, uniformity of style and presentation, good reproduction of figures, a minimum of typographical errors and a useful index.

This book *Flavonoids in Biology and Medicine III*, was apparently not produced with such high ideals in mind, concentrating as it does on quantity rather than quality. The book records the proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Flavonoids in Biology and Medicine held in Singapore in November 1989. We are told that some 44 papers and poster were presented at the symposium, so it is all the more surprising to find 60 papers in the book which runs to 602 pages. The papers are reproduced directly from the authors' manuscripts by photo-reduction and the quality of reproduction of some of the figures leaves a lot to be desired. With so many papers a useful index, any index, is essential but none is provided here so searching for pieces of interest is particularly difficult. Using the titles of the papers as a guide only 9 or so papers seem to directly concern free radical biology. The remainder cover a diverse array of topics from several disciplines including flavonoid chemistry, plant biology,

cancer and even traditional Chinese medicine. The majority of the pieces related to free radicals have as their theme that flavonoids can act as free radical scavengers and antioxidants. This has been established for some time and it was of interest to me to see if there were any significant advances in the field. Perhaps the large number of compounds available for investigation is responsible for apparent lack of focus in this area, since from the evidence presented here progress is slow.

It has to be said that the overall quality of these papers on flavonoids as free radical scavengers is low. Honourable exceptions include the paper by Halliwell's group, examining the distinct structure-activity relationships involved in inhibition of lipid peroxidation as opposed to inhibition of lipoxygenase or cyclooxygenase by a range of flavonoids. Also worthy of mention is the paper by Jan et al. investigating possible interactions between quercetin and vitamin E. Brevity is the only problem with those two papers but unoriginality and low scientific quality mars most of the other papers concerning free radicals. We even find the same data reproduced in two separate papers by the same group. With the exception of the papers mentioned most of the free radical-related papers found here would not be of sufficient quality to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Our understanding of the ability of flavonoids to act as free radical scavengers and, most importantly, our understanding of whether this is of any importance physiologically or of potential medicinal value will not be advanced by most of the work presented here.

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