
 Book reviews

Friedmann, Th.: Gene Therapy: Fact and Fiction. Cold Spring Harbor: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory 1984. 131 pp. Soft bound \$ 5.95.

The publication of the Banbury conference on "Gene Therapy – Fact and Fiction", held in Cold Spring Harbor in 1982, is addressed to a broad, non-scientific audience. Friedmann transformed the scientific presentations into an account suitable for a lay public. This is a marvellously good idea and done in an excellent way. It is a bad habit of many organizers of symposia and conferences to publish all contributions in a book, most times at least a year afterwards. Insiders and specialists in the field then are no longer eager to read the complete out-of-date book, except maybe for their own contribution. Outsiders cannot get an overview of the field covered by the conference out of the sophisticated and detailed articles. The Banbury Center has to be congratulated for the unorthodox way it has used to solve the obligation for dissipating the expertise which was brought together in the conference room.

In seven chapters Friedmann summarizes the prospect of managing genetic disease through the replacement or regulation of genes. The emphasis is on the science itself and moral and ethical issues were not included in the conference programme. However, in chapter 7, the author gives his personal view. In chapter 1 the scope of the conference is described. Chapter 2 is an introduction for laymen on human genetics. In chapter 3 discussions on gene therapy were centered around "we can't start and we can't stop". Chapter 4 enlarges the layman's idea on genetic diseases to susceptibilities, cancer, among others. "Classic" treatments of genetic diseases are discussed in chapter 5. Technical possibilities and impossibilities of all the steps needed to replace a defective gene or reactivate a silent fetal gene form the core of the conference and are clearly reviewed in chapter 6. In the final chapter it becomes clear that we are far from a regular treatment and still have to discuss if an experimental treatment in desperate cases is feasible.

A glossary further helps to make this book very informative. This book really is a jewel of information that gives the public access to the views of the most eminent leaders in the field of the prospects of gene therapy. Its originality is symbolized in "The Eye of Horus" on the cover.

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Vasil, I.K.; Scowcroft, W.R.; Frey, K.J. (eds.): Plant Improvement and Somatic Cell Genetics. New York, London, Paris: Academic Press 1982. xi+300 pp., several figs and tabs.

This book is based on two symposia, "Cell Culture and Somatic Cell Genetics in Plant Biology" and "Frontiers in Plant Breeding", held at the XIIIth International Botanical Congress which took place in Sydney/Australia in August 1981. It was produced by Rapid Manuscript Reproduction and contains chapters in several different type styles as well as quite a number of the unavoidable typographical errors which seem to be an unfortunate byproduct of this rapid technique. Many a reader will find his/her name spelled in several unusual ways throughout the book, a negligence which is no longer justifiable in view of increasing use of computer programs for literature collections and citations.

The book contains 14 review articles on basic topics in the two fields mentioned above and a 500-term index. The references are published without titles which saves space but slightly limits the usefulness of review articles. Literature coverage in most papers is up to 1981 with a few 1982 "in press" citations. Consequently, rapidly developing fields like those covered in the chapters on Plant Cell Transformation and Somatic Cell Fusion for Inducing Cytoplasmic Exchange were no longer topical at the date of this late review (May 1984).

A unique and attractive feature of this book is the fact that it combines well written reviews on modern aspects of conventional plant breeding (for example, Exotic Germplasm in Resistance Breeding; Multiline Breeding; Alien Genome Combination and Embryo Rescue) with those on cellular techniques which may become plant breeding tools (for instance, In Vitro-Haploidy; Somaclonal Variation; Protoplast Fusion; Cell Transformation) in a small and handy volume. I saw the book immediately after its publication (and some of the chapters even much earlier) and have used it since then regularly in research and teaching. Also, I recommend some of the chapters to undergraduate students as a textbook supplement. Overall, this book is one of the most useful texts amongst the recent flood of crop improvement proceedings.

F. Hoffmann, Irvine