Islands is attributed to red squares (jargon for diathesis positives males) amongst the Allied troops fraternising with female islanders during the second world war—seemingly in defiance of conventional rules of gestation since many of the affected patients were born before the war.

Later, Field strays from the genetics of multiple sclerosis to embrace several other disorders under a unitary hypothesis of membrane structure. The text is liberally sprinkled with quotations, many unattributed, but perhaps more than any other part this passage epitomises the type of evidence on which this book will have to be judged. Finally, in support of his hypothesis, Field dismantles the evidence that steroids and all forms of immunosuppression have a role in the treatment of multiple sclerosis and recommends instead a regimen consisting of various preparations of Naudicelle, vitamins E and C, a low animal fat diet, living in peace, tepid baths, and never swimming unaccompanied. In addressing the question 'can multiple sclerosis be virtually eradicated?' he highlights the issue that has dismayed many neurologists dealing with distraught parents who have been advised that their family has the multiple sclerosis diathesis. He advocates Naudicelle twice daily in young children increasing to six tablets after ten years and has little sympathy for negative responses—'usually professional . . . or ostrich attitudes . . . often encountered in medical practitioners'—to his counsel. Many readers are going to find it hard to accept the Lamarckian position that the inherited defect of myelin underlying multiple sclerosis would be corrected, and the condition eradicated, if all red circles (women with the multiple sclerosis diathesis) were to restrain from pregnancy until the red cell abnormality has been restored to normal by treatment with essential fatty acids.

When it comes to his critics, Professor Field pulls no punches. 'Alvord's opinion has . . . been as fluctuating as is the course of multiple sclerosis . . . in 1984 he was in one of his up phases of belief'. He swipes gratuitously at grant giving agencies and young scientists brainwashed by the dogmatic opinions of their supervisors; 'without interrupting the continuous clicking of his hand counter, the researcher looked up to pass the time of day . . . the old man (an eminent authority on lymphocyte traffic) was expecting a high result and this [would] please him' may belong in a book of medical cartoons but does not illuminate a serious scientific document. A nursing officer who smoked heavily and could presumably recognise herself is castigated for contaminating the E-UFA apparatus so that it had to be washed out with 1 litre of distilled water. And in an astonishing outburst, failure of the neurological community to take up the E-UFA test is attributed not to its deficiencies, or any lack of sensitivity and specificity (4 false positives are described) but to a political conspiracy lead by the then Secretary of the MRC (Sir John Grey) 'who had just recovered from a prolonged illness . . . subsequently had to take very early departure from the MRC . . . [and closed] the only unit specifically devoted to the elucidation of multiple sclerosis . . . by which time the damage was done and the knowledge on the advances made in recognising the multiple sclerosis diathesis were quashed'. Field then lashes out at three neurologists—Reginald Kelly, Helmut Bauer and John Walton—for

incompetent handling of the facts in their muddled assessments of his work. He introduces and then names the young neurologist 'who spent 4 working days in our laboratory during which he . . . spent a bare ten minutes seeing how the cells move drawing the comment that one will hardly become a pianist by watching Claudio Arrau at work! In his discussion of the epidemiological aspects of multiple sclerosis, Field pokes at 'a world famous children's hospital in London and an equally famous hospital for nervous disease' (can anybody help with the identities?) where a case of multiple sclerosis defied diagnosis but was subsequently picked up by clinical examination and family E-UFA studies. The author warms up the final two chapters with a further outburst against granting agencies—mostly his old enemy the MRC—and goes over the same Kelly, Bauer, Walton routine, adding a fourth muskateer (David Bates). Those who carry out clinical trials receive a severe wiggling for employing defective methodology but some of Field's ideas are bizarre—'the only proper controls for a clinical trial of patients with multiple sclerosis is (sic) those with neurosyphilis, massive gliomata, advanced arteriosclerosis and alcoholism'. Some may also find excessive the self-congratulatory references to the author's publications and entries in Citation Classics.

Lively debate, refuting dogma that has not illuminated difficult problems, and adventurous thinking are essential for scientific progress and those who break new ground often have to be persistent in the face of criticism. EJ Field has made observations in the laboratory from which he has constructed an hypothesis which he believes to be correct; others do not share his conviction. The treatment Field recommends seems to be harmless but in negotiating the difficult interface between research and clinical practice, the hopes and fears of vulnerable individuals must never be exploited.

ALASTAIR COMPSTON

Childhood Epilepsies: Neuropsychological, Psychosocial and Intervention Aspects. Edited by: BRUCE P HERMANN, MICHAEL SEIDENBERG. (Pp 264; £26.95.) Bognor Regis, John Wiley & Sons Limited, 1989.

This is a multiauthored book, sixth in the Wiley Series on Studies in Child Psychiatry, edited by two American psychologists. I can not say that I picked up this book with much enthusiasm for, with the current explosion of medical publishing, numerous volumes of this sort exist. These are of limited (if any) value acting mainly to clutter libraries and service bibliographies. Such prejudice proved unjust; this book is very useful; most chapters are well written and cover a range of subjects beyond the usual melange. There are four major parts to the book. First, are medically orientated chapters, including excellent chapters on the classification of childhood epilepsies by Dreifuss, and by Zeilinski on the associations of childhood epilepsy and mental retardation. This latter chapter is exceptionally clear and interesting on an often murky and confusing subject. Second, are chapters concerned with neuropsychological functioning, including aca-

demic achievement, cognitive function and psychological prognosis. Third, are three chapters concerned with the effects of epilepsy on behaviour and social adjustment. David Taylor is good on the difference between epilepsy—the illness, and epilepsy—the predicament. The predicament encompasses such psychosocial constructs as pseudo-death, hyperpaedophilia, and paroxysmal displays; and (as is characteristic of the author) this is original and stimulating, and is followed by an excellent exposition of the sociology of epilepsy. Finally, there are chapters concerned with treatment, here interpreted in its widest sense incorporating psychological and vocational intervention (Schotte and DuBois), as well as surgery (Wylie). Indeed, the emphasis on psychology and on wider social and behavioural issues is a common and instructive theme. The editors are to be congratulated on a well conceived and tightly edited volume, which is also refreshingly original.

SD SHORVON

Nerve Growth Factors. Ibro Handbook Series: Methods in the Neurosciences Vol. 12. Edited by: R A RUSH. (Pp 351; £47.50). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1989.

This volume dedicated to Nerve Growth Factors represents a further excellent contribution to the IBRO Handbook Series. The hardbacked book contains 17 chapters written by leading scientists. The chapters cover a wide range of techniques which are currently available for the investigation of the role and significance of Nerve Growth Factors in the nervous system. Fittingly, the foreword, written by Professor Levi-Montalcini acknowledges the wealth of sophisticated methods now available and challenges the present generation to reveal novel aspects of the neurobiology of nerve growth factors. The major focus of the book is on nerve growth factor, although specific chapters deal with other growth factors such as ciliary neurotrophic factors and neuroleukin. However, many of the techniques described offer a general applicability for investigation of other trophic factors. The book is designed for use as a laboratory manual. The volume is divided into six major sections which deal with methodological aspects of purification and bioassay systems for nerve growth factors, histological localisation of nerve growth factor and its mRNA, administration of nerve growth factor and antibodies to nerve growth factor, molecular biological techniques for the structural analysis and assay of nerve growth factor and a final section dedicated to receptor technologies, namely purification, characterisation, quantification and molecular cloning. An introduction to each of these subjects is given. This is well referenced with background reading. The remainder of each chapter is largely devoted to a comprehensive description of the method. Some chapters also include appendices. In many instances to add clarification to specific points and technical details are nicely illustrated high quality black and white photographs and/or line drawings. Perhaps an indication of the usefulness of this book is that on reading each of the chapters, even if one is not conversant with the method one would feel confident to try the method.