

Book Reviews

disastrous roll-call of physical suffering. These cases, more than any formal statistics, give some indication of medical conditions from which recovery was unlikely, and illustrate the frail hold on life and the immediacy of death for many people, apparently fit and well, to whom an accident became a gangrenous wound or for whom diarrhoea was fatal. The inclement weather, vermin, and lack of food or clothes were common reasons for death, while the activities that preceded death, and were thought contributory, included bell-ringing, intemperate eating or drinking, quarrelling, fighting, and sports.

Recently, suicide has become of greater interest to social historians, and the Wiltshire examples, most of whom were said to be lunatic, reinforce other evidence, so that hanging, drowning, and cutting their own throats were the commonest methods used. More inventive suicides jumped into deep wells, out of windows; poisoned, shot, or stabbed themselves. Murder inquests show the greatest variety; all social classes were victims, perpetrators were frequently relatives, and the acquittal rate was high. Of those found guilty, the added punishment of being dissected and anatomized was specified in a dozen instances, and one coroner was himself the recipient of corpses. Infanticide particularly concerned contemporaries as a means of concealing bastardy, and historians will welcome firm evidence for the practice. In Wiltshire, some fifty cases were investigated and the majority of guilty mothers acquitted, but a small group, for reasons not apparent at the inquest, were executed and subsequently dissected. The coroners themselves emerge from their records with distinct personalities, with brief or wordy comments that often read as direct speech; some were appointed from the same medical families across several decades.

Natives of Wiltshire will have their own reasons for buying this volume, but for readers outside the county it is to be warmly recommended. The indexes, especially that of subjects, are well organized and accurate; the main text is clearly laid out chronologically. It in no way detracts from the Editor's achievement to describe this book as a very useful tool; for those working on the later eighteenth century generally, it contains much material not easily available in print, and medical historians of the period will appreciate the accessibility of some splendid new sources.

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DAVID BEARMAN and JOHN T. EDSALL (editors), *Archival sources for the history of biochemistry and molecular biology. A reference guide and report*, Boston, Mass., American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in conjunction with the American Philosophical Society, 1980, 4to, pp. xii, 338, \$28.00.

In 1975, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society set up a Survey of Sources for the History of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. The intention was to locate as many archival sources of historical material, to publish the results of that survey, to disseminate among scientists and historians knowledge of what kinds of material exist, and to stimulate the formation of well-ordered archives of scientific rewards and papers. This volume, edited by David Bearman and John Edsall, with other contributions by Margaret Miller and Matthew Konopka, is the fruit of those labours of some five years. This volume and the accompanying microfiche guide will undoubtedly be enormously useful to many historians of science and medicine, not only those interested in biochemistry and molecular biology. The mass of primary and secondary material listed here is very impressive; as is the evidence that great care has gone into trying to produce indexes of the material that can be searched in a number of ways, either by computer or without that technological assistance. Basically, two kinds of material have been located, personal papers and institutional records, and the files which list brief descriptions of such material can be searched, by looking up a scientist's name in the index, or using a subject heading, such as "Research, ATP" or beginning with the name of an institution.

Just how easy it is to use efficiently I am not sure. I found the book, which is prefaced by several essays on the origins, relevance, aims and history of the project, somewhat difficult to

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penetrate. I looked for the usual introduction on “How to use this book”, and did not find it, until page 39. Equally, it takes a little searching to find out why a large section of the listed material is not actually reproduced in the book, but is on the microfiche. Finally, the coverage of countries is heavily towards Britain and North America, although this is only explained in one of the essays. Even this enormous survey is not exhaustive, and should not be regarded as such. However, I am sure that motivated users of the catalogue will be able to cope with these problems and be helped considerably in the location of archival material.

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A. G. MORTON, *History of botanical science*, London and New York, Academic Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xii, 474, illus., £8.80 (paperback).

Botany has on the whole been well served by its historians, but readers have long felt the need for a fresh account of this science, particularly one that takes advantage of modern insights and scholarship. Age can hardly wither Julius Sachs's *History of botany*, but things have surely changed since the 1860s. When Sachs was considering the history of his subject there was little to say about plant physiology or the developing fields of cytology or genetics; photosynthesis was still a mystery, ecology merely a strange word coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866. Despite a passionate interest in every aspect of the botanical sciences, Sachs therefore found it hard to make his book more than a story of advances in classification and the anatomy of plants – the very areas guaranteed to make eyes glaze and heads nod.

Professor Morton has achieved the near impossible in his *History of botanical science*, providing us with a lively, informative, and interesting survey of botany. Like all good histories, it throws new light on familiar figures and introduces others unknown to most professional scholars. J. B. Amici, Anton de Bary, and Joachim Jung take their place alongside old favourites like Ray and Grew; Theophrastus is reassessed; Goethe is well discussed. Yet the real merit of this book lies in the author's determination to continue the story through to the present day, and his ability to place every event and intellectual achievement firmly in its context, demonstrating that the history of plant life is more than counting stamens. Botany is here integrated with movements in the other sciences, and neatly interwoven with a larger history of Europe. Medicine, horticulture, and the needs of agrarian economies are given their due, as are the vagaries of scientists (laziness, p. 183, political allegiance, p. 232) and quirky interludes such as seventeenth-century tulipomania, where rare bulbs were changing hands for thousands of guilders. The commonsensical approach of the text is also cleverly backed up by long, discursive footnotes which, for the connoisseur of such things, are a delight in themselves. It would be hard to find a better study.

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S. M. WALTERS, *The shaping of Cambridge botany*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 4to, pp. xv, 121, illus., £17.50.

Charles Raven wrote of John Parkinson's *Theatrum botanicum*, published in 1640, as being the work of a man revealing “the authentic passion for a garden, and the quiet wisdom of a gardener” (quoted by Walters, p. 9). Surely these same words could be applied to this volume that marks the sesquicentenary of Henslow's Botanic Garden at Cambridge University. Walters gives an account of the development of botany at Cambridge, which shows a wealth of primary research and sympathy for predecessors who found their life-work in the study of the living plant. Indeed, the book is sub-titled “A short history of *whole-plant* botany at Cambridge from the time of Ray into the present century”. There is a useful bibliography, and the author is especially good as a biographer of J. S. Henslow (1796–1861), to whom he gives credit for removing the plant from the herbarium, and for emphasizing that it was a living thing – “Henslow had foreshadowed the dethronement of Linnaean systematics, but circumstances pre-