

Book Reviews

editors for at least seven years. A valuable side-product of this concentrated editorial activity has been the stream of theses and articles produced by the team during the period of their labours. The editors properly distinguish their edition as "critical" because, as they point out, "the absence of any Trevisa holograph . . . the loss of his latin copy-text, some unresolved *cruces* and ambiguities of syntax and synonyms . . . impose at every turn a need for editorial discrimination and so make textual finality impossible". There are, of course, Latin manuscript texts extant which derive, at some remove, from the copy-text, and there are also the early printed editions. The student has a convenient 1964 German reprint of the Frankfort printed Latin edition of 1601. A third volume to complete the edition under review is promised "about 1978". This will contain Introduction, Commentary and Glossary.

What does this edition provide for the student of medieval science? That the language is Middle English is less of a hindrance for the non-philologist than might be supposed. The format is one which will be familiar to anyone who has used recent editions published for the Early English Text Society. Three or four letters peculiar to medieval English will give trouble for the first few minutes only. Even in the interim before the promised Glossary appears there is very little in the vocabulary to cause difficulty, provided due caution is observed. Readers with a smattering of Latin will find most of their problems resolved by a glance at a text in that language.

Here, at last, is a reasonably accessible, comprehensive, reference tool on most of the topics relating to the natural world which exercised the mind of medieval man, or at least the minds of that tiny sub-species of medieval man which inhabited the universities and centres of learning. Of the nineteen books into which *Of the properties of things* is divided, seventeen deal with subjects falling within the domains of medicine and science. The other two, appropriately at the beginning, pass in rapid review the more metaphysical parts of theology concerned with the nature of God and of those "creatures" (e.g. angels) higher up the chain of being than man. Other books describe the Soul which (according to medieval ideas) has psychological and biological dimensions as well as theological ones; the human body, its attributes and ills; the universe; times and seasons; and the "matter and form" of all created things. There are books dealing with birds and animals, plants, stones and metals, with meteorology (in both its ancient and modern senses), topography, and a splendid final section on matters ranging from colours to spiders' eggs, weights and measures, and musical instruments. *Of the nature of things* represents the "normal science" of the high Middle Ages. That this science was circumscribed by tradition to the point of stasis, compared with the science of later centuries, does not detract from its present fascination or its historical importance as a facet of thirteenth-century society.

Any review before the appearance of volume three must reserve final judgement. What we have so far deserves the warmest praise and welcome. A single, crippling drawback is the price, which will put the book beyond the reach of most of the individuals likely to need it.

DAVID ELLISTON ALLEN, *The naturalist in Britain. A social history*, London, Allen Lane, 1976, 8vo, pp. xii, 292, illus., £9.00.

The British naturalist is here chronicled for the first time, and his activities and

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social background surveyed from the seventeenth to the present century. He has indulged in botany, ornithology, zoology and geology, and as far as animal life is concerned his habits in the nineteenth century spelt ecological doom, comparable with the onslaughts of African hunters today. The author has the breadth of knowledge necessary to cover this large field, and his handling of a voluminous amount of material is praiseworthy, although it would be interesting to know more about the many eccentrics who have indulged in natural history pursuits. But as well as wreaking havoc amongst various species with their predatory collecting instincts and overloading museums and drawing rooms with specimens, the amateur naturalist in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also contributing to the overall development of biology.

The scientific background is well enough understood, and the influence of technology in the form of the camera, microscope, gun and the railway are all dealt with here. However, the social, economic, ethical and religious aspects of the naturalist are equally significant, although more difficult to pursue. Dr. Allen discusses them all carefully and effectively. The relationship of amateur to professional is another problem to be considered, and it is interesting to compare it with the situation in other disciplines.

In all, this is an excellent and scholarly book on a large and complicated topic. It is an important addition to the social history of biology, and it is also relevant to the history of medicine for many naturalists have been physicians, before and since Linnaeus. At a time when the majority of therapeutic agents were of plant origin, botany and the associated field-work of botanizing were essential parts of medical education. The naturalist has, however, often been overlooked, and Dr. Allen's unique history is thus most welcome. It is to be hoped that he will continue to explore and write on aspects of his topic that he has not been able to deal with fully here.

DAVID DAVIES, *The centenarians of the Andes*, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1975, 8vo, pp. 128, illus., £3.95.

Man has always been fascinated by the possibility of prolonging life, and when this appears to take place naturally in certain parts of the world, much interest is engendered. This has been the case with the centenarians of Central Asia and Southern Ecuador and much myth and speculation about them has accumulated.

It is, therefore, a notable advance to have the personal account of a gerontologist who has investigated what seems to us to be improbable longevity. Dr. Davies visited Ecuador four times and with his collaborators has prepared remarkable records proving without doubt that individuals there do, in fact, survive for periods unknown in the civilized world. His book is the first study of the oldest authenticated living people in the world today and he presents a fascinating account of them, supported by excellent photographs. He also includes a comparative study of these centenarians with those of Central Russia where, however, documentary evidence is absent.

Another purpose of Dr. Davies' book is to encourage a greater understanding of this type of community and what they have to teach us. The "whiff of immortality" they give us is itself an incentive to live longer! A most interesting and enjoyable book.