

## Book Reviews

his eighties. In 1835, he married and settled in Paris as a teacher at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, while conducting agricultural experiments with his brother-in-law on an estate in the Alsace, which was sustained economically by revenues from oil-bearing sands. Although McCosh's account of the collaboration with Dumas and the fat controversy with Liebig does not replace that given by F.L. Holmes in his study of Bernard and animal chemistry, he provides a good account of Boussingault's single-minded devotion to unravelling the nitrogen cycle. The book is marred by copious misprints, but is otherwise an exemplary biography.

W. H. Brock  
Victorian Studies Centre  
University of Leicester

JOCHEN KEIDEL, *Johann Heinrich Dierbach (1788–1845)*, Stuttgart, Deutscher Apotheker Verlag, 1983, 8vo, pp. vi, 220, illus., DM.32.00.

Tracing the life-story of a man who never became a household name, despite his contribution to science, can be difficult. Nevertheless Jochen Keidel, using sources such as city and university records, personal letters, published works, and published critiques by other scholars, has pieced together the absorbing story of the Heidelberg professor, J. H. Dierbach.

Against a background of almost continuous financial difficulties and discriminatory uncongenial working conditions, Dierbach, the son of a master-bookbinder, emerged as a first-class classical scholar, a brilliant teacher, a splendid botanist, an experienced and capable pharmacist, and a physician who never practised medicine. Keidel reveals the way in which Dierbach sought to present botany as a scientific discipline with up-to-date terminology, although his textbook *A guide to the study of botany* (1820) caused much criticism of his modernizing efforts.

To a pharmacist, Dierbach's *Outline of prescription art* is a veritable mine of information on medicine of the time, and includes a survey of contemporary medicines and 227 formulae with relevant therapeutic information and annotations. Keidel discusses classification, theoretical background of formulations, dosage and form of Dierbach's medicine, but he only reproduces two prescriptions in detail, thereby encouraging the reading of Dierbach's original text.

The author shows how Dierbach the historian was able to use his broadly spread talents to advantage. Thus he was able to assess authoritatively the ancient physicians and botanists, and one of his works, the *Flora mythologica*, was considered worth reprinting in 1970.

Today, as in Dierbach's own time, there are questions still unanswered. Was Dierbach a skilled compiler whose reassessments based on sound classical and scientific knowledge are of considerable value to science or was his torrent of publications of little value? Keidel's book sympathetically presents a well-researched, well-annotated account of Dierbach's life, times, and work, but he shrewdly leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions.

W. E. Court  
Shipley, West Yorkshire

FRED ROSNER, *Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides*. New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1984, 8vo, pp. xiv, 325. \$9.95 (paperback).

The author provides a useful introduction to his work in the opening chapters, beginning with a concise biographical sketch of Maimonides and descriptions of his major literary works. Maimonides' ten medical works are then described more fully, with many valuable notes relating to translations and printed editions. The reader's attention is finally focused on the fourteen books contained in *Mishneh Torah* itself.

The corpus of the work systematically draws together the many dicta relative to medicine and medical practice scattered throughout *Mishneh Torah*, presenting a lively insight to the world of medieval Jewry. The second treatise, 'Moral dispositions' (*De'oth*) of the first book of *Mishneh Torah* is translated in full, due to its importance for all matters concerned with health including the ethical standards in which humans thrive. The importance and value of the individual essential to Judaism and strongly upheld by Maimonides is the subject of the third

## Book Reviews

chapter. Chapters on human anatomy, physiology, and pathology with obstetrics and the whole area of gynaecology follow. Sexual relations are dealt with in chapters 6 and 7 and Maimonides' beautiful description of the relationship between a man and his wife is given in translation from the treatise on marriage *Eeshuith* (15:19 & 20) on p. 178. Death and Jewish customs observed in connexion with it, along with the criteria by which death is determined, are described. Veterinary medicine, alcohol, leprosy, and astrology are among the variety of topics treated in the final six chapters.

In addition to *Mishneh Torah*, Rosner has drawn upon the vast corpus of Maimonidean, Biblical, and Talmudic writings often relating dicta of the ancients to present-day customs and observances. The work is both interesting to read and encyclopaedic in content, with the added bonus of excellent bibliographic information in the notes at the end of each chapter. Dr Aaron Twerski concludes his foreword with the words of the sages, "One good deed leads to another". The fecundity of Rosner's pen bears ample evidence of past good deeds, the present work being the latest exemplar, and the prospect of more is assured by a number of the author's works referred to in the notes as "in press" or "submitted for publication".

Nigel Allan  
Wellcome Institute

LUIS GARCIA BALLESTER, *Los moriscos y la medicina*, Barcelona, Editorial Labor, 1984, 8vo, pp. 256, [no price stated] (paperback).

This book is the result of long years of research by one of the outstanding historians of Spanish medicine. According to the author's preface, the book is a continuation of his previous work, *Historia de la medicina en la España de los siglos XIII al XVI*, vol. I (Madrid, AKAL, 1976) and includes a revised and enlarged version of one of its sections, 'La minoría musulmana y morisca' (pp. 77–182). The book is, in fact, devoted entirely to the medical practices of the Moriscos, a Spanish-Moslem community forcibly converted to Christianity at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Because they were ultimately unable to assimilate into Christian society, the Moriscos—who had lived in Spain for hundreds of years—were expelled from the country a hundred years later.

The book approaches its subject, with no small measure of empathy for the persecuted minority, from two different but complimentary angles. First, it measures the great loss suffered by Spanish science in general, and Spanish medicine, in particular, because of discriminatory practices and, second, it offers a multi-faceted examination of Moriscan medicine and medical practices.

Sixteenth-century Spain had a great advantage over its fellow European nations during the period of "scientific renaissance" and Galenic "medical humanism". It had access to most of the very precise Arabic translations of Greek medical treatises, together with commentaries upon them by Moslem and Jewish scholars, such as Avicenna's *Canon of medicine*. It has as well a large community of Moriscos who knew Arabic well and could have made these treasures of medical lore available to Spanish scientists. But the opportunity was lost because of the religious fanaticism of Christian Spain. The Moriscos were ostracized and persecuted and the use and study of Arabic prohibited. The over-zealousness and narrow-mindedness of Spanish society proved tragic for the Moriscos, but it was no less tragic for the development of Spanish intellectual life.

In dealing with Moriscan medicine itself, the author performs a masterful job of anthropo-sociological reconstruction, illuminating the variety of medical branches in both their scientific and social aspects. The undertaking was made possible by the wealth of material painstakingly extracted from the reports of interrogations and legal proceedings carried out by the courts of the Inquisition against Moriscos suspected of secretly adhering to Islamic law or simply transgressing against the precepts of Christian orthodoxy. Thanks to the unusual monograph of the French historian, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), we have become a good deal more cognizant of the value of the Inquisitorial archives. The great advantage of these sources over other written