

Book Reviews

A Biographical Dictionary of Scientists, ed. by TREVOR I. WILLIAMS, London, A. & C. Black, 1969, pp. xi, 592, £5.

World Who's Who in Science . . . from Antiquity to the Present, ed. by ALLEN G. DEBUS, Chicago, Ill., Marquis—Who's Who Incorporated, 1968, pp. xvi, 1855, \$51.

The publication of these two important reference works within only a few months of each other is indicative of the present demand for easily-accessible information about the lives and work of the leading contributors to science. Although they seem to present the potential purchaser with a problem of choice, the purpose and character of each is different. The British work is 'designed for the general reader as well as the serious student' and offers 'over 1,000 biographies of eminent scientists and technologists' in large clear type set in double columns. Written in a discursive form, avoiding technical language as much as possible, each entry has a list of authoritative references for further reading. In short, it is the kind of book—like the *Dictionary of National Biography*—which one can pick up and read at random to satisfy one's interest.

The American volume, on the other hand, contains over 30,000 entries set in small type in three columns on a large page, on the same pattern as the publisher's other 'Who's Who' volumes. This is a marvel of compression and will probably not call for any critical comment from those concerned only with modern figures, but the historian may find this treatment a little bizarre.

It has been calculated that the vast majority of all scientists who have ever existed are still living. More than a half of the entries in the present volume refer to living scientists and have been checked for accuracy by the biographee. To force the historical entries into the same kind of rigid pattern must have faced the editor with many challenges to his historical sensitivity, for Professor Debus is himself a historian of science. However, both he and his publishers are to be congratulated on bringing this tremendous undertaking to a successful conclusion. It is of course an indispensable first-line reference work which one will expect to find in any library.

F. N. L. POYNTER

The Diary of Richard Kay (1716–51), a Lancashire Doctor, ed. by W. BROCKBANK and F. KENWORTHY, Manchester, University of Manchester Press for the Chetham Society, 1968, pp. vii, 179, illus., 50s.

Ten years ago *Medical History* published extracts from the diary of Richard Kay, an eighteenth-century general practitioner in Bury, Lancs. These gave a tantalising glimpse into provincial medical practice as well as a view of education at Guy's Hospital. Dr. Brockbank and the Rev. F. Kenworthy have now edited a more substantial version of this diary, from a typed manuscript in Manchester Reference Library.

Its appearance is most welcome. Far too few primary sources exist for the history of eighteenth-century general practice. This one shows us a provincial doctor coping with a busy practice and a troublesome conscience. In both respects Kay was probably fairly typical of a large number of provincial doctors in the mid-eighteenth century. Certainly there can be nothing unusual about his intense religious feelings or his

Book Reviews

introspective cast of mind. These were the mark of the Dissenter. As such a person he could never resist a sermon, and there were many in the course of a month: nor could he stay away from scientific lectures. He attended, for instance, discourses on optics, mechanics, mathematics, ophthalmology (by the Chevalier Taylor), and travelled to Manchester to see the anatomical models newly invented by Abraham Chovet. In all this Kay was a child of his time and class, for it was the educated, questing nonconformists who were to make some of the most significant contributions to eighteenth-century science—witness the Warrington Academy.

All this activity still left Kay time to cover enormous distances on his rounds. He unflinchingly talks about his patients in sympathetic and conscientious tones, almost as if he were their pastor. Whilst his therapeutics are no better and no worse than one might expect from a man in his situation, what does impress is his amazing persistence in helping patients who were seriously ill. Two years in the diary deserve special mention. In one of them Kay attended lectures (Smellie, Sharp, Belcher) at Guy's Hospital. In the other (1745) he reports the gradual progress, and precipitate retreat, of the Scottish rebels as they moved through Manchester towards London and then back to Carlisle.

Kay rarely goes into detail about anything, which is a pity. Unfortunately his failure to provide us with a solid meal is in no way made up by his generosity with religious and moral supplications. Here is where the editors could and should have used their pruning knife. Space would then have been liberated for a longer introduction and fuller notes. As these stand they are gravely deficient. They make little attempt either to place Kay in his medical and social background or to elucidate references to people, apart from dissenting ministers.

E. GASKELL

Botanico-Periodicum-Huntianum, ed. by G. H. M. LAWRENCE, *et al.*, Pittsburgh, Hunt Botanical Library, 1968, pp. 1063, \$30.00.

This massive compendium—a kind of World List of Botanical Periodicals—is an outgrowth of the Hunt Library's project to index all the books and articles on botanical topics from the period 1730 to 1840. It gives about 12,000 titles and includes lay periodicals such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Titles are accompanied by 'non-ambiguous abbreviations' and the reader is referred to these, when necessary, from variant-abbreviations used in other sources. The compilers have thus established a new set of standards, which combine clarity with brevity. What is more, they have arrived at these standards from an investigation of the numerous and often deficient forms which abbreviations now take. Just how misleading these can be is shown by a comparison of some commonly used ones with those newly advocated by the Hunt Library. The compilers promise to publish a larger study of the rationale behind this investigation. Historians, however, will probably look forward with greater anticipation to the exceedingly ambitious botanical-index out of which this periodical-list has sprung.

E. GASKELL