

Book Reviews

Z. M. BACQ, *Chemical transmission of nerve impulses. A historical sketch*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. [xii], 106, illus., £7.00.

The most appropriate individual to survey advances in a complex scientific field of research is a person who has contributed importantly to it. Such is the case with this book, which was published first in French in 1974, for Professor Bacq has worked on the chemical aspects of nerve transmission for several decades. It is fitting that the appearance of the English version coincided with the centenary in 1975 of the birth of Sir Henry Dale, another eminent scientist whose name is inseparably connected with the concept under discussion. Since 1945–50, when it gained general acceptance, there have been dramatic developments in the biochemical and pharmacological aspects of the problem. It is this story that Professor Bacq is eminently suited to recount. He introduces it briefly both from the physiological and the historical standpoint, and then relates the work of such men as T. R. Elliott, Dale, Loewi, Cannon and many more.

It is exceedingly valuable to have this personal account, not only for its masterly handling of a complicated subject, but also for Professor Bacq's comments on his own work and on that of his contemporaries. He admits that he is presenting a biased account, and that certain opinions will be challenged by others. Nevertheless he provides data that may never appear elsewhere in print, and their usefulness equates with the information gathered by the technique of oral history.

One of the fascinating aspects of this history is the rivalry between those committed to the chemical theory of the nerve impulse and those favouring the electrical explanation. This story has yet to be told fully, but when it is the present book will be of vital importance. In general it can be highly recommended to those involved with the physiology of nervous transmission, whether in the laboratory or in the library. It is also a classic contribution to the history of the medical sciences. And although there may be unhistorical statements and false interpretations in it, the historian of the future will find it an essential source.

JAMES O. BREEDON, *Joseph Jones, M.D. Scientist of the Old South*, Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky, 1975, pp. xiii, 293, illus., \$13.25.

Little has been written so far on the science, such as it was, of the Old South, or on the medicine of the Civil War, and Professor Breedon, a general historian, in a scholarly book helps to alleviate this lack. In this, the first of two volumes, he traces and interprets the career of Joseph Jones (1833–1896) as a physician, research scientist and teacher in the Old South. He became one of the antebellum South's leading scientists, as well as teaching chemistry and natural science, improving medical education, and acquiring expert knowledge of diseases of the South. During the Civil War he studied medical problems of the armies, hospitals and prisons, in particular tetanus, gangrene, typhoid, malaria, etc.

Jones certainly deserves a full-scale biography and Breedon has made extensive use of the ample primary material that is available and his deep knowledge of the antebellum South. Just as important is his graphic account of nineteenth-century conditions in peace and in war. His book should therefore have wide appeal for it is not of parochial interest only.