

Book Reviews

RENÉ J. DUBOS, *The Professor, the Institute, and DNA*, New York, Rockefeller University Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. vii, 238, illus., \$14.50.

Oswald Theodore Avery (1877–1955), nicknamed “The Professor”, worked as a bacteriologist for thirty-five years at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in New York City, now the Rockefeller University. He devoted his research almost exclusively to the pneumococcal cell, and his professional lifetime spans and illustrates the pathway from nineteenth-century bacteriology to modern molecular biology. René Dubos, professor emeritus of the Rockefeller University, was a colleague and close friend so that he is able accurately to depict the life and achievements of a man whom few would recognize by name. Dubos’ scholarship and style are universally acknowledged as outstanding, and this book adds to his distinguished contribution to the history of medicine.

Although Avery diverged on to a seemingly minute topic, his was the kind of research that reveals generalities, notably those relating to cellular structure, chemistry, physiology, as well as to immunology and genetics. There is no doubt that he was an important force in establishing America’s place in the world of medical research and will be especially remembered for being the senior author of a paper published in 1944 which identified DNA as the purveyor of genetic information.

Dubos relates all this skilfully and accurately, and he uses his own recollections to describe Avery’s personality and personal life; appendices contain a list of his writings and various memorabilia. This book will merit as one of the best scientific biographies produced in recent years, and it will serve as a suitable memorial to a man so far neglected.

SAMUEL FASTLICHT, *Tooth mutilations and dentistry in pre-Columbian Mexico*, Berlin, “Die Quintessenz”, 1976, 8vo, pp. 164, illus., \$42.00.

The author is well known for his researches into pre-Columbian dentistry in Mexico and in this book he brings together the results of his many investigations, with the addition of fresh interpretations. After surveying the historical and cultural background, he deals with the custom of decorating and mutilating the teeth, practised by nearly all the natives of Mesoamerica from the first millennium before Christ up to the Spanish Conquest (1519–1521). This constitutes the main part of the book and considerable space is devoted to the techniques used for filing and inlaying. In the case of the latter, jade, iron pyrite, hematite, turquoise, quartz, and other substances were cemented into cavities drilled in the incisor and canine teeth. Technological and geological aspects of the inlay material and the cement used are considered in detail. In a third section oral hygiene, diseases, and therapy are discussed, and in an appendix the dentition of pre-Columbian skulls is examined and the author concludes that the shovel-shaped teeth of the ancient Mexicans indicates their Mongol origins.

The book is a scholarly contribution to a fascinating subject and is liberally illustrated, often with colour photographs. It will no doubt come to be considered a classic. Its present defect is a lack of information concerning the reason why these dental mutilations were carried out, and, although Dr. Fastlicht offers some evidence, this must constitute the next phase of his researches.