

## Book Reviews

Finally some progress has been made towards the establishment of a chair for medical history at the University of Oslo.

BERNHARD GETZ (*Secretary*)

### SECTION OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

DURING the session 1963-4 Mr. T. G. Wilson delivered a Presidential Address, 'Swift and the Doctors'.\* Mr. J. McAuliffe Curtin read a paper on *James Quinlan, formerly Surgeon General to the Czar of Russia 1812-1846*. A guest speaker, Mr. W. R. Lefanu, read a paper on *Two Irish Doctors in England in the Seventeenth Century*.

J. B. LYONS

## Book Reviews

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*A History of Chemistry*, vol. IV, by J. R. PARTINGTON, London, Macmillan, 1964, pp. xxxii, 1007, illus. £10 10s.

In the narration and documentation of its history, chemistry has been one of the more fortunate sciences. Many of its most able practitioners have displayed an intense interest in the origins of their subject, and the history of science has often been enriched by their contributions. Few of them, however, have attempted to paint on so vast a canvas as Professor Partington has done in his *History of Chemistry*. This magnificent work has been ambitiously conceived, and executed with the meticulous care that chemists have come to expect from the author. Although new ground is broken in several ways it stands in the great tradition of Gmelin, Kopp, and other masters of chemical historiography.

The fourth and latest volume of this work deals with the history of chemistry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recent developments receive only brief treatment as information on these is freely available elsewhere. There are five parts. The first part is untitled and by far the longest, comprising over half the book. It deals, in roughly chronological order, with the development of general chemical theory from 1800 to the time of Kekulé. The remaining parts are the histories of, respectively, Physical, Organic, and Inorganic Chemistry, and Radioactivity and Atomic Structure. Broadly speaking, they cover the growth of the subject after the period in Part I, though there is inevitably a good deal of reference to earlier work.

The method of treatment in the first Part is to group a series of related developments into a chapter entitled with the name of the worker chiefly associated with them. This plan involves inclusion of much incidental biographical material which is of great interest but is sometimes a distraction from the main theme. It works well with a giant like Berzelius (Ch. V) but is less successful with others, Laurent for example (Ch. XII). The dangers of the 'great man' approach to the history of science are accentuated by this method of treatment, but the author is clearly aware of this, and does his best to avoid them. Chapters on early electrochemistry, atomic weights, early organic chemistry and the theory of types enable these topics to be discussed more

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