

### *Book Reviews*

information concerning the contents and author rather than the publication *per se*. Together it provides a unique survey, the like of which is not available in the history of medicine. The last three volumes deal exclusively with British authors, many of whom practised medicine and in some cases are better known as medical practitioners than as veterinarians.

In view of its value as a source-book, and despite the fact that the bibliographical detail is not always trustworthy, the publishers are to be commended for producing a reprint of it. The fact that it is of elegant workmanship is also to their credit.

EVA CRANE (editor), *Honey. A comprehensive survey*, London, Heinemann, 1976, 8vo, pp. xvi, 608, illus., £15.00.

The editor is Director of the International Bee Research Association and is one of the most renowned apiculturists in the world. Together with twelve colleagues, who are also international experts, she has produced a remarkably comprehensive survey of information on honey. The sixty-eight-paged bibliography, with more references in the text, indicates its scholarly nature and encyclopaedic character. There are sections on honey production, the characteristics of honey, its preparation for the market, and honey as a commercial product, but historians of medicine and biology will be especially interested in the last two chapters. In 'The language of honey' (pp. 426–438) the origins of "honey" and associated words are discussed in a detailed but readily comprehensible manner. The last chapter, 'History of honey' (pp. 439–488) is by Dr. Crane, who surveys honey since before the appearance of man, a topic that has been little explored, to modern honey production from 1900 onwards. Although she at times reveals historical naïvety, her account is accurate and one of the best short ones available.

The book is well illustrated and the indexes are excellent. It can be warmly recommended as an outstanding work, which will remain for some time a standard treatise on all aspects of honey, including its history and philology.

K. C. CHANG (editor), *Food in Chinese culture. Anthropological and historical perspectives*, New Haven, Conn., and London, Yale University Press, 1977, 8vo, pp. ix, 429, illus., £14.40.

In few countries is food allied so closely to culture as in China, and Professor Chang's book aims to provide for the first time in English an anthropological study of this tradition by analysing a culture through its eating habits. Not only are the foodstuffs themselves described in great detail, but also the unique methods of producing, preserving, preparing, serving, and eating them, and their effects upon society. The approach is chronological, ranging from ancient to modern China, each of the eight collaborators contributing a chapter on a historical period; the last two deal with modern China, north and south. The amount of data is at times overwhelming, especially when foods are described without interpretation. But the most interesting aspects of the book are the discussions of factors influencing cooking of food, such as religion, the importation of foreign commodities, economic and social development, military operations, technology, the absence of taboos, the moral and magical rules of daily existence, amongst others. The role of food sym-

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bolism in literature is another absorbing topic.

There is obviously a great deal of interesting information for the medical historian in this scholarly book, and a similar treatment of western cultures would provide a fascinating challenge.

F. BIANCHINI and F. CORBETTA, *'The kindly fruits'*, English adaptation by M. A. Dejeu, illustrations by M. Pistoia, London, Cassell, 1977, fo., pp. 241, illus., £12.50.

*Le piante della salute* appeared in 1975 and has now been adapted into English. It deals with eighty-two herbs and plants that have been used for centuries in the kitchen and, or, in medicine. Each is described and its location and uses, together with historical references, are given. One of the outstanding features of the book is the quality of the exquisite coloured illustrations for each plant. The entries contain a good deal of information, but there is no documentation of it. A large 'Appendix', revised by Professor G. E. Trease, the distinguished historian of pharmacy, provides for the reader who seeks additional technical data, but again there is no literature cited. Here the plants are arranged in groups determined by the human system upon which their principal pharmacological action prevails, with cross references to the main part of the book. There is a bibliography of fourteen items, and glossaries, botanical and pharmacological, following the 'Appendix'.

This is a most attractive work which will be useful mainly to those who seek information on herbal and medicinal plants, but who do not require scholarly detail. The latter can, of course, be found in the many source-books of the nineteenth century.

G. FRANKCOM and J. H. MUSGRAVE, *The Irish giant*, London, Duckworth, 1976, 8vo, pp. 128, illus., £3.95.

Medical curiosities and anomalies have always attracted interest, but few more than giants. There have been many examples, but one of the most interesting, and now the best documented, is Patrick Cotter (1760–1806). The authors, who are from the Department of Anatomy, Bristol University, give an excellent, detailed account of his life, supported by a considerable amount of research into contemporary literature, and richly illustrated. Cotter's medical history is reconstructed and there is a section on the physical features of his skeletal remains.

Cotter was about eight feet in height and one of the most famous British giants, not, however, to be confused with Charles Byrne (died 1783) whose skeleton was acquired by John Hunter and is now in the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Other giants too are described here.

The book illustrates the best kind of medical history. The authors present a fascinating study of an intriguing topic based on literary and scientific data and in so doing provide a model that could be used by others investigating similar phenomena. At the same time, the publishers have produced a most attractive volume at a modest price.