

Book Reviews

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 Each is described and its location and uses, together with historical references, are given.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.