

A Textbook of Evolution

By Prof. Edward O. Dodson. Pp. xviii+419. (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Co., 1952.) 5 dollars; 25s.

THE past few decades have seen very noteworthy contributions to the study of evolution by such authors as Dobzhansky, Goldschmidt, Simpson, Mayr, Huxley, Haldane, Wright and others, but there are few text-books in which this modern work has been summarized in a form suitable for students in the first two years of their university career. This is the gap which E. O. Dodson has attempted to fill for American students, as G. S. Carter has for British. The book under notice is characterized by extreme clarity of exposition, both of the theoretical problems involved and of the factual material. It does perhaps attempt rather too much in some respects. Is it possible to summarize the whole comparative anatomy of the animal and plant kingdoms, from viruses up to the primates, in about 130 pages? Is it even necessary in a text-book devoted to evolution? British students of zoology, at any rate, will deal with such topics more fully in other parts of their course. The most valuable part of the book is the fourth, which is devoted to the recent studies on natural selection, species formation and similar evolutionary mechanisms. This contains a selection, on the whole judiciously made, of material which can otherwise only be found in original papers or books addressed to a much more advanced audience. The book is well illustrated and has a good index.

Government Information and the Research Worker

Lectures delivered at a Vacation Course of the University of London School of Librarianship and Archives in April 1951. Edited with an Introduction by Ronald Staveley. Pp. vi+228. (London: Library Association, 1952.) 24s.; to members of the Association, 18s.

A PAPER by Mr. W. Cox on "H.M. Stationery Office Publications", given at the Aslib Conference in September 1949, provoked some discussion on Government publications. The subject was also raised at subsequent meetings of Aslib, both in Glasgow and in Manchester, in the following year, when difficulties being experienced in locating or obtaining such publications were stressed. In the following year a series of lectures, dealing with the resources of the major Government ministries and departments likely to be of value as sources of information to the research worker, were delivered at a vacation course of the University of London School of Librarianship and Archives. The interest taken in this course, which was attended by more than a hundred librarians and information officers, has now led the Library Association to publish these lectures, with the exception of two.

These exceptions, however, are important. The first was Mr. E. M. Nicholson's introductory address on "The Government and Research", and the second was that in which Dr. W. R. Francis described the present Government agencies and departments in which scientific research is undertaken or sponsored. These lectures are omitted at their authors' request because the subjects have since been covered in the official pamphlet "Government Scientific Organisation in the Civilian Field". Accordingly, the claims of the book on the interest of the scientist are slender, and are largely limited to Dr. D. J. Urquhart's brief chapter on the "Department of Scientific and Industrial Research as a Source of Information for Research

Workers', and Mr. L. R. Poole's account of "The Technical Information and Documents Unit". The account of the research resources of the Ministry of Supply is also brief, due to the same security requirements which led to the omission of the three Service Ministries and the Ministry of Civil Aviation. This is not to say that the scientist or technologist will not find the accounts of some other departments, such as the Ministry of Fuel and Power or the Ministry of Works, of interest; but, by and large, the book is mainly of interest to the social scientist rather than to the scientist in general.

Subject to the omissions mentioned above the book covers the ground fairly thoroughly, and the various chapters bring out the extent to which the needs of both librarian and research worker are appreciated at a high level in most ministries, and the extent to which the departments are anxious to be of service. R. B.

Avicenna, Scientist and Philosopher

A Millenary Symposium. Edited by G. M. Wickens. Pp. 128. (London: Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1952.) 15s.

IN the year A.D. 980 was born within the borders of Afghanistan one who came to be nicknamed Ibn Sina. During the fifty-seven years of his life he became a figure of world renown in the person whom the medieval schoolmen called Avicenna. A Persian of the Persians, he was an intellectual prodigy, poet, mystic, medical man and *bon viveur* all rolled into one. Alas, he was not devoid of conceit, combined with a curiously refined arrogance. His influence through the ages has been tremendous, as this collection of lectures delivered at Cambridge in his honour abundantly proves. The six speakers comprised two Arabists, two Hebraists, a scientist-philosopher, and a modern linguist—surely an appropriate team.

By them we are given an insight into Avicenna's life and work; an estimate of his place in Asiatic philosophy; an account of some aspects of his activities; an appraisal of his influence upon Jewish thought, and upon medieval scientific tradition; and finally, a description of the effect he had upon the thirteenth century, more especially, of course, upon St. Thomas Aquinas. Compact references accompany the text.

Avicenna, who contributed to metaphysics the concept of a necessary Being whose essence and existence were identical, was the same person who experimented with many drugs, and demonstrated his mastery of the inductive method. Authors and publishers have done well to pay him homage in producing this first-class book. F. I. G. RAWLINS

Green Thoughts

By Sir Stephen Tallents. Pp. 192. (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1952.) 15s. net.

THOSE who enjoy Sir Stephen Tallents' essays in periodicals and newspapers will be delighted to have this collection in more permanent form.

The anthology covers a wide range of country topics and pursuits around the year, and they are described with characteristic charm. One feels throughout that Sir Stephen's affection for his wood-fed fire, his crooked rake and beloved scythe, are part of the heritage of the venerable sanctuary which is now his home. The chapters on moles and nettles are particularly rewarding; but the final essay on scything is surely the most complete memoir of the art and theory of that ancient practice.