mode of formation of vegetable alkaloids is still left open, but on the whole it is considered that the work done recently rather supports the view that alkaloids are formed from the decomposition products of proteins. As regards the function of alkaloids in plants, the view most widely accepted now is that they are ultimate products of metabolism, and of no further use to the plant. Among useful new processes of alkaloid analysis may be mentioned the citrate method of estimating quinine (p. 516) and the ferrocyanide process for quantitatively separating strychnine from quinine (p. 518).

The volume contains a two-hundred-page index to the whole work, which is indispensable to analytical laboratories dealing with organic products. The editor is to be congratulated upon the successful completion of his lengthy task.

C. S.

OUR BOOKSHELF.

Om Laegekunst hos Perserne. By A. Christensen. Pp. 103. (Medicinsk-historiske Smaaskrifter, 18.) (Kφbenhavn: Vilhelm Trydes Forlag, 1917.)

THIS small work of one hundred pages constitutes the eighteenth pamphlet of the Medicinsk-historiske Smaaskrifter edited by Vilhelm Maar and published in Denmark. We have reviewed the other volumes in a previous issue, and regret that an announcement in the present pamphlet indicates that the series, for the present at any rate, has reached a conclusion. The subject of Persian medicine has been dealt with by many historians, and Dr. Christensen has brought our knowledge up to date. He divides the matter into four chapters: the Zoroaster period, ancient Islam medicine, the period of Avicenna, and recent Persian medicine. An appendix with a translation of one of the four treatises of the "Tchahar makala" of Nizami-i-Aruzi (twelfth century) completes the account. The medicine of the Avesta, the original document of Zoroaster's religion, is fully dealt with, and the influence of Ahura Mazda, the all-wise spirit, in maintaining health is analysed. The demoniacal concept of disease and its production through the agency of Anro Maiynus —the evil mind—is carefully considered. The fall of the Sassanian empire in the seventh century and its conquest by the Arabs has had a profound influence on the subject of medicine, for it was through the Arabs, notably Rhazes and Avicenna, that the great works of classical antiquity were restored to European learning, enriched with the valuable commentaries of these diligent students of the dark ages. Dr. Christensen's researches constitute a distinct addition to our knowledge of this interesting period.

The "Wellcome" Photographic Exposure Record and Diary. Pp. 256. (London: Burroughs Wellcome and Co., 1918.) Price 1*s*.

THIS well-known pocket-book has all its usual features, in spite of the exigencies of the times. The main article has been rewritten, and gives concise but sufficient directions for the use of "tabloids" in all the usual photographic operations. It includes development by time and temperature, tank development, factorial development, fixing, intensification and reduction, and printing processes, the use of various development papers, carbon printing, and oil pigment printing, the making of lantern slides, various toning and staining processes, and colour photography by means of autochrome, Dufay and Paget colour plates. The mechanical calculator attached to the cover, with the necessary tables and lists, from which the photographer will select those details that apply in his particular case, has established its trustworthiness and convenience by many years of experience. A useful diary, plenty of space for recording exposures, a copious index, sundry tables, etc., and two illustrations "from the front," or very near it, complete the volume. It is interesting to note that in the classified lists of photographic materials there are given considerably more than two hundred different kinds of plates and films, forty-five kinds of bromide paper, and twenty-nine kinds of lantern plates, although German and Austrian goods are excluded.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

[*The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts intended for this or any other part of* NATURE. *No notice is taken of anonymous communications.*]

The British Scientific Instrument-making Trade.

THE progress of science as the result of experience gained during the present war will call for increased effort on the part of British manufacturers of scientific instruments at the conclusion of hostilities. Moreover, the knowledge gained by our principal enemy by virtue of the British blockade will give her a lead over us in many directions, since she has been forced to bring the brains of her leaders of scientific thought to bear on many problems of vital moment to the life of their country.

From this it would seem as if British scientific instrument makers were called upon to co-operate more closely than has been the case in the past, if they are to meet the competition they will be called upon to face as soon as Germany is in a position to reconstruct her industries when relieved from the burden of war.

The object of the present letter is to suggest the formation of an institution which, while retaining most of the features of existing scientific societies, will provide means for greater effort in collaboration, as regards training, research, and propaganda, with the view of increasing the field for British-made instruments. As was pointed out by the present writer in an article in NATURE of August 16, 1917 (vol. xcix., p. 488), Germany has always realised the value of research as applied to the instrument-making trade, but the same cannot be said for this country. One of the first tasks, then, confronting such an institution, if established, would be the installation of a properly equipped and staffed laboratory, in which investigations could be carried out (1) in the interests of individual members, (2) in the interests of the general body of members. It may be objected that this would mean usurping the functions