These have been accessible hitherto only in the original Ashmolean manuscript and in a copy made about eighty-five years ago for the library of the Royal Society. The selections from these records which have been appearing recently in NATURE well illustrate their matter, and make quotation here unnecessary; but in this book Mr. Gunther has annotated them with explanations, citations, and cross-references, and the whole is most useful to the student. These notes, and the re-edited Index, must be the product of a very great deal of labour, coupled with an acquaintance with the relevant sources such as probably no one but Mr. Gunther can compass, and the reader will not fail to acknowledge the authority which these editorial notes too modestly attest.

Mr. Gunther has prefixed an introduction of sixteen pages, reviewing the establishment of the Society, and exhibiting its near concern with the early Royal Society. The Transactions of the Oxford assembly refer, of course, to a period twenty to thirty years after the founding of the Royal Society, towards which by this time it stood in the relation of an adopted daughter and handmaid. There is, indeed, room for doubt concerning the continuity of the Oxford Philosophical Society after 1651, near which date it was founded for the first time—whether under its later name or not—by the distinguished men who had had the still earlier "Invisible College" in London. In the 'fifties it was really a non-corporate cluster of brilliant workers, who were thereafter drawn for their organised scientific intercourse to Gresham College in London, where they founded the Royal Society. By 1683, however, a fresh generation of virtuosos had arisen at Oxford, with the grave old mathematician Wallis and the buoyantly inquisitive Dr. Plot as their mainstays, so that it became worth while to found the society anew; and it is at this stage that the doings portrayed by Mr. Gunther begin.

At a casual inspection, the spirit informing these doings is reminiscent of nothing so much as that of a private museum collected by Huckleberry Finn: excepting when it is in the vein of a solemn crank in a club—"what Creature makes ye greatest noise in proportion to its bigness? Probably 'tis ye *Teredo*." Such a comparison is unfair to many truly weighty contributions; but there is a measure of real truth in the attribution of a boyish love of oddities. For it was a time when an altogether new set of fairy tales had been made possible to read, in the shape of natural lore; and these charming amateurs were eagerly reading them for the delight of marvels newly revealed. For us, their tales have become old-fashioned, if we look merely at the facts told in them; but we still, like Huck and the old Oxford scientists, are lucky enough to have the boyish hope of new surprises; and it is to the seedling which men like them fostered, and which is fructifying so fast in the twentieth century, that we owe our gratification of that hope to-day. In two or three centuries hence, our own present delight in quanta, protons, or vitamins will doubtless be looked upon as pleasantly ingenuous and even amusing; but these things will have been no more and no less necessary to the science of posterity than are the *Quaere's* and discoveries of the seventeenth century to ours, for their purpose was our own and we derive it from them. Let us therefore "praise famous men and our fathers who begat us." IRVINE MASSON.

Our Bookshelf.

The Mammals of South Australia. By Dr. Frederic Wood Jones. Part 2: Containing the Bandicoots and the Herbivorous Marsupials (the Syndactylous Didelphia). (Handbooks of the Flora and Fauna of South Australia, issued by the British Science Guild (South Australian Branch) and published by favour of the Honourable the Premier). Pp. ii+133-270. (Adelaide: R. E. E. Rogers, 1924.) 4s.

WITH the appearance of the second part of his review of the mammals of South Australia, Prof. Wood Jones completes the account of the monotremes and marsupials. It is at once the most exhaustive and comprehensive guide to these two groups that has yet appeared, and is distinguished for its originality of treatment, for the vast amount of most interesting observations on the habits of these animals based on an intensive field experience, and for the large series of clearly reproduced illustrations from original drawings which serve to elucidate the text.

Prof. Jones is revolutionary in his conclusions on the problems which are connected with the marsupials as a whole. He rejects the division of the group on tooth characters in favour of one based on the characters of the pes, and classifies them into Didactyla and Syndactyla. The former have retained their primitive polyprotodont condition, while the latter have become further differentiated into those retaining the primitive dentition (polyprotodont) and those in which the dentition has become specialised (diprotodont). This classification is based on the grounds that the syndactylous condition is not the result of degeneration, but of a specialisation resulting in a highly organised anatomical mechanism for combing the hair. As such it is more likely to have arisen only once in evolution than to have become developed independently in two different phylogenetic races. There are, moreover, no didactylous diprotodonts. In this view of the phylogeny of the group the author follows Bensley, and is in opposition to the generally accepted arrangement. The argument is put forward with considerable force and, it must be said, with conviction. Prof. Jones's contention, too, that the marsupials reached Australia from the north, *via* Malay, is equally cogent, and deserves at least the considered attention of those who favour the alternative and generally accepted view of their immigration from South America.