

BOOK REVIEWS

YADIN'S MASADA

Masada

Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand. By Yigael Yadin. Pp. 272. (212 illustrations.) (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd., 1966.) 63s. net.

It is impossible to avoid using the word unique in connexion with Prof. Yadin's excavations at Masada, and difficult to avoid using it at least four times. First, the site is uniquely meaningful to Jews as the locale of the magnificent gesture of defiance by their forebears in A.D. 73, when almost a thousand Zealots committed suicide rather than submit to Rome. Second, it is a site of unique archaeological importance, because the palatial buildings that Herod the Great erected there in the first century B.C. have scarcely been disturbed since they were destroyed in 73, and have thus been preserved to a remarkable degree for antiquarian study. Third, the excavation itself was unique, both in the quality of its leadership and the enthusiasm of the thousands of volunteers who flocked to the shores of the Dead Sea to share in the effort and excitement. And, finally, this book is surely a uniquely successful example of what a popular account of such an archaeological adventure should be.

After introductory chapters, Yadin takes the reader on a conducted tour of the site, and in lucid prose, with attractive plans and excellent photographs, re-creates the splendours of Herod's desert retreat—the palaces and baths, the synagogue (the earliest yet found), the fortifications and the administrative buildings. The state of preservation of the remains and the scale on which they were excavated have made Masada a veritable museum of late Hellenistic art and architecture, in which the wall paintings and mosaics take pride of place. More poignant, if of less scientific value, are the remains of the final Zealot occupation, the discarded relics of their last tormented hours on earth, while both poignant and invaluable are the written testimonies, including portions of fourteen Hebrew scrolls, some of them Qumranic. Yadin describes all this against a background of history drawn from Josephus, and with constant reference to the trials and triumphs of the excavators themselves. The ancient and the modern stories are superbly knit together, and although academic controversy will no doubt one day ensue from the final scientific report, for the present both professional and layman can enjoy and profit from this admirable book.

P. J. PARR

GENESIS OF GENETICS

A History of Genetics

By A. H. Sturtevant. (Modern Perspectives in Biology.) Pp. viii + 165. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965.) 44s.

No history of genetics can ignore three places in which key work was done in the early days: the Königs-kloster in Brunn; Merton House in Granchester, near Cambridge; and a small laboratory, 16 ft. by 23 ft., in Columbia University, New York. The experiments in the Königs-kloster were history before the history of genetics really began, but we are privileged still to have with us people who worked with Bateson and others who worked with Morgan in those early exciting days, and to have their retrospective accounts written with first hand knowledge. Punnett's article, "Early Days of Genetics", enlivens our

understanding of what life was like for those connected with Bateson around 1904, and the present book is a history of genetics by one of Morgan's most famous associates and students.

Though brief, it is a balanced history of genetics up to about 1950. It brings out for the thinking reader not only the interdependence of discoveries, but the extent to which controversy and difficulty repeatedly arose from ignorance and error. A notable example of this is considered in the chapter on pre-Mendelian times, when so much depended on knowledge of fertilization in plants that no one was agreed about. We often forget, for example, and we may be forgiven inasmuch as Mendel did not mention it in his paper, that Mendel had to satisfy himself by experiment that only one pollen grain was necessary to produce a seed, a vital factor in his work.

From the first pre-Mendelian chapter, the author takes us through chapters on Mendel, the period 1866–1900, the rediscovery, genes and chromosomes, to linkage and the "fly room", as Morgan's laboratory was called. Thereafter the remaining chapters make no attempt at chronological treatment, but consist of a set of essays on the development of different aspects of genetics, in which the growth of discovery is recorded.

This book is easy to read. It is a history of genetics, not of biochemical genetics or population genetics or any other adjectival branch of the subject, so that the treatment is balanced, and it really is a history in the sense that nothing comes from nowhere. There is continuity. Discoveries are not presented solely as starting something, but also as arising from something. Biochemical genetics, for example, begins in 1902 and has a framework set by Garrod, Bateson, Wheldale, Onslow, Scott Monterieff and Wilson, who suggested that nucleic acid was responsible for heredity as early as 1896.

The book has, however, two slight deficiencies. One, which Sturtevant acknowledges, is its bibliography which includes only some of the work mentioned. This, though understandable, seems a pity, for with a more complete bibliography the book would provide an excellent basis for a "reading course" in genetics.

The second is that, though excellent as a history of discoveries, it lacks personality and hence does not generally succeed in generating atmosphere and excitement. In fact the only personality in the book is the fly room. When we reach this room the book suddenly takes life and we get a glimpse, such as only the first hand historian could give us, of what it is like to be part of a laboratory that bursts with communal excitement. However, this glimpse alone would make the book worth while, and a co-ordinated history of genetics discovery was badly needed. A good deal of genetical knowledge is required to read it with maximum profit, but all who do will be grateful to the author, for few but he could look at the origins of genetics in the light of present-day genetics with so much first hand experience.

J. M. THODAY

BAMBOO

The Bamboos

A Fresh Perspective. By F. A. McClure. Pp. xv + 347. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1966.) 80s. net.

THIS excellent account of the bamboos is particularly valuable from the standpoint of taxonomy and plant