

## Book Reviews

invaluable commentary throwing new light on a number of Richardson's observations, and a series of important appendices which provide critical appraisal of Richardson's notes on birds, mammals, fish, and plants. There is some new evidence of Richardson's expertise in lichenology by John W. Thomson, and a very detailed examination of his geological field work by W. O. Kupsch.

Dr Houston has also gone to considerable trouble to plot the true course of the expedition and the distances it travelled by comparing somewhat contradictory data. It is unfortunate, therefore, that he could not have found better maps on which to superimpose his findings. It might also have helped to have had one of Dr Houston's neat little tables to provide ready reference to the numbers, categories, and ultimate fate of the various Indians who joined the expedition at one time or another. That said, this is a splendid book which all who are interested in Arctic exploration would be delighted to possess and which happily complements Richardson's recent biography by Robert E. Johnson. Together, they give Richardson his rightful place in the annals of polar exploration for, in the words of Dr D. A. Stewart, which Dr Houston quotes: "It is not every day that we meet in one person—surgeon, physician, sailor, soldier, administrator, explorer, naturalist, author and scholar, who has been eminent in some roles and commendable in all."

Sir James Watt

WALTER PAGEL, *Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance medicine*, edited by Marianne Winder, London, Variorum Reprints, 1985, 8vo, pp. x, 346, £32.00.

The articles gathered together for this collection date from 1935 to 1981 and represent some of Walter Pagel's major studies on the role of religion, gnosticism, and Neoplatonism in the development of modern medicine. The importance of this collection stems from a number of features. First, two or three of these essays originally appeared in obscure and difficult-to-obtain sources and are now easily available for the first time. Second, it includes a number of Pagel's most important publications such as his survey of 'Religious motives in the medical biology of the XVIIth century' (1935) and his *Supplement to the Bulletin of the History of Medicine* on religion and philosophy in the thought of J. B. van Helmont (1944). Third, not only has none of these pieces been superseded by Pagel's subsequent writings (his *Supplement to the Bulletin* on Helmont, for example, is very definitely *complementary* to his recent book on *Joan Baptista van Helmont*, Cambridge, 1985) but it is also true to say that they have never been surpassed by any subsequent scholarship. Indeed, it might even be said that when the history of the history of science comes to be written this collection will stand sure testimony to Pagel's historiographical influence and importance. In the early (pre-1945) pieces, for example, the author repeatedly makes whiggish pleas that "Paracelsus created the modern conception of disease" or that Helmont was led by his religious views "to an extraordinarily well-founded vitalism which approaches reality". In 1935, statements like that had to be made, to justify any studies which strayed too far from the positivist paths of pure scientific progress. Pagel's aim, as so entertainingly expressed in the first essay in this collection, was 'The vindication of "rubbish"' (1945). Here, and in his other early studies, Pagel was trying to beat whiggish historians of science at their own game. He was able to show that even those aspects of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century natural philosophy which measure up most convincingly to a modern scientist were derived from religious and Neoplatonic beliefs—rubbish—of the most recondite kind. By the 1960s, however, Pagel clearly thought this battle had been won and was far less apologetic about the "relevance" of his later studies of "gnostic" ideas in the Paracelsian corpus. Pagel played a major role in changing the historiography of science in this way and this collection presents some of the best evidence there is of the fruitfulness of his approach.

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