

Book Reviews

social background surveyed from the seventeenth to the present century. He has indulged in botany, ornithology, zoology and geology, and as far as animal life is concerned his habits in the nineteenth century spelt ecological doom, comparable with the onslaughts of African hunters today. The author has the breadth of knowledge necessary to cover this large field, and his handling of a voluminous amount of material is praiseworthy, although it would be interesting to know more about the many eccentrics who have indulged in natural history pursuits. But as well as wreaking havoc amongst various species with their predatory collecting instincts and overloading museums and drawing rooms with specimens, the amateur naturalist in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also contributing to the overall development of biology.

The scientific background is well enough understood, and the influence of technology in the form of the camera, microscope, gun and the railway are all dealt with here. However, the social, economic, ethical and religious aspects of the naturalist are equally significant, although more difficult to pursue. Dr. Allen discusses them all carefully and effectively. The relationship of amateur to professional is another problem to be considered, and it is interesting to compare it with the situation in other disciplines.

In all, this is an excellent and scholarly book on a large and complicated topic. It is an important addition to the social history of biology, and it is also relevant to the history of medicine for many naturalists have been physicians, before and since Linnaeus. At a time when the majority of therapeutic agents were of plant origin, botany and the associated field-work of botanizing were essential parts of medical education. The naturalist has, however, often been overlooked, and Dr. Allen's unique history is thus most welcome. It is to be hoped that he will continue to explore and write on aspects of his topic that he has not been able to deal with fully here.

DAVID DAVIES, *The centenarians of the Andes*, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1975, 8vo, pp. 128, illus., £3.95.

Man has always been fascinated by the possibility of prolonging life, and when this appears to take place naturally in certain parts of the world, much interest is engendered. This has been the case with the centenarians of Central Asia and Southern Ecuador and much myth and speculation about them has accumulated.

It is, therefore, a notable advance to have the personal account of a gerontologist who has investigated what seems to us to be improbable longevity. Dr. Davies visited Ecuador four times and with his collaborators has prepared remarkable records proving without doubt that individuals there do, in fact, survive for periods unknown in the civilized world. His book is the first study of the oldest authenticated living people in the world today and he presents a fascinating account of them, supported by excellent photographs. He also includes a comparative study of these centenarians with those of Central Russia where, however, documentary evidence is absent.

Another purpose of Dr. Davies' book is to encourage a greater understanding of this type of community and what they have to teach us. The "whiff of immortality" they give us is itself an incentive to live longer! A most interesting and enjoyable book.