

BOOK REVIEWS

Plant Drug Analysis: by H. WAGNER, S. BLADT and E. M. ZGAINSKI. Springer, Berlin, 1984. 320 pp. \$63.10.

This is the English translation by A. Scott of 'Drogenanalyse' produced a year ago by Professor Hildebert Wagner and his coworkers of Munich University. As already noted of the German edition (see *Phytochemistry* 23, 476), this is a unique and remarkable collection of 170 colour plates of TLC separations of medicinal plant extracts. The rapid availability of an English version is to be welcomed, since it provides an invaluable guide to TLC adsorbents, solvents and spray reagents for all the major classes of natural product.

Although the book is aimed specifically at an audience

of pharmacists seeking to check the identity of a particular plant drug material, it will be of interest to many other phytochemists. Thus, there are illustrations of the separations of reference compounds as well as of plant extracts. There are also many useful tips and hints about how to achieve the best separations and how to recognize the components being resolved by TLC. Additionally, the volume provides a quick reference to the major chemical principles of all the more common drug plants in use in Europe today.

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The Chemistry of Natural Products: edited by R. H. THOMSON. Blackie, Glasgow, 1985, pp. 468. £46.

During the last ten years the number of people studying the biosynthesis of natural products has diminished quite markedly, perhaps because all the major pathways of secondary metabolism are now known, at least in outline. In contrast, interest in the chemistry of natural products, and in particular synthetic endeavours, have increased dramatically. In this same period we have witnessed the publication of at least six books on biosynthesis, and many texts concerned with the chemistry of particular classes of natural products have also appeared. The admirable books of Nakanishi *et al.* (*Natural Products' Chemistry*, Vol. 1, 1974 and Vol. 2, 1975, both Academic Press; Vol. 3, 1983, O.U.P.) provide a very comprehensive coverage for some natural products, but ignore others, though the books do make superb casual reading. What was needed was a text that reviewed the exciting developments in natural products' chemistry, and that included all classes of natural products. This new book does just that.

Professor Thomson has assembled a team of experts who have written authoritatively and enthusiastically about their favourite natural products. The book is organized along biogenetic lines, though biosynthetic pathways receive only passing mention, and the main

concerns of all the contributors are structure, chemistry and synthesis. The nine chapters cover carbohydrates, aliphatic compounds, aromatic compounds, terpenoids, steroids, amino acids etc., alkaloids, nucleosides etc. and porphyrins. The developments noted inevitably reflect the authors' own interests, at least to some extent, but the book is none the worse for this. It has an abundance of illustrations (1500 diagrams), and in the main these are close to the relevant text. Each chapter has a full list of research references together with lists of pertinent review articles and books, and the 14 page index is reasonably comprehensive.

There is something for everyone, and the book can be recommended both as an excellent review of the decade's highlights in natural products' chemistry, and also as a source of inspiration for those in search of a research project. It would be a pity if the substantial price deterred individuals from purchasing a copy, and a cheaper paperback version would, I believe, achieve good sales. I look forward to the next volume in 1995—or perhaps it should be sooner.

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