

### Book Reviews

*Fourcroy, Chemist and Revolutionary (1755–1809)*, by W. A. SMEATON, Cambridge, printed for the author by Heffer & Sons, 1962, pp. xxi+288, 40s.

Antoine François de Fourcroy was one of Lavoisier's group of brilliant French chemists who achieved fame both as scientists and as men of affairs. His life was eventful and makes fascinating reading, particularly when superbly presented as in the volume under review.

Born to poverty, Fourcroy brought to the battle of life qualities more valuable than money—ambition, ability and activity. Financially helped by friends, whom later he repaid, he qualified in medicine, but like many another embryo doctor he turned to chemistry. A professor in a veterinary college at twenty-eight, he was eventually to hold Chairs at the Jardin du Roi, later the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, the École de Médecine and the École Polytechnique. A brilliant lecturer and orator, he became the leading teacher of chemistry in France. His books went through many editions and were translated into several European languages. He was a competent and careful investigator and published over 160 papers but it is as a teacher rather than as a research worker that he is to be remembered in chemistry. The ultimate acceptance of Lavoisier's views is owing in large measure to their skilful presentation by Fourcroy; strangely enough he was slow at first to accept these ideas.

He became a member of the National Convention in 1793 and played a part in the establishment of the metric system of weights and measures and in the development of scientific education in France at all levels. He continued this work under Napoleon, becoming Director-General of Public Instruction. It should be noted that the author takes a favourable view of Fourcroy's character, particularly in relation to his attitude at the time of Lavoisier's execution. This is at variance with McKie's assessment in his classical life of Lavoisier. McKie regards Fourcroy as one of the scientists morally responsible for the tragedy.

There is still a need for an integrated account of Lavoisier and his colleagues on the lines of *Napoleon and His Marshals*. The meeting on 8 January 1794, at his house between Lavoisier, under arrest, and his former collaborators is a dramatic moment in the history of chemistry.

Much scholarly thought and investigation have gone to the making of this volume. The number of primary sources quoted is impressive and a tribute to unflagging industry. The work can be strongly recommended to all who are interested in an important period in chemical history.

T. S. WHEELER

*Medicines for the Union Army. The United States Army Laboratories during the Civil War*, by GEORGE WINSTON SMITH, Madison, Wisconsin, American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, 1962, pp. vii+119, 8 illus. \$2.75.

In this closely documented, factual account of the Union Army's venture into pharmaceutical manufacturing during the American Civil War, George W. Smith, Professor of History at the University of New Mexico, presents one facet of that war which has not hitherto received scholarly attention.

This little book is concerned with the procurement of drugs for the Union Army, first through the regular system of Medical Purveyors, then through the agency of United States Army Laboratories. Two of these were established in the spring of 1863 on the initiative of Surgeon General William A. Hammond, one at Philadelphia, the other at Astoria, New York. The author traces the history and operation of these