

BOOK REVIEWS

NATURAL PRODUCTS RELATED TO PHENANTHRENE, by L. F. Fieser and M. Fieser. Pp. XII + 704. 3rd Edition. Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 330, West Forty-Second Street, New York 18, U.S.A., 1949. £4 0s. 0d.

This book was first published early in 1936, and a second edition followed within twelve months. No substantial changes were made in the text, but data published during 1936 were summarised in an appendix of 90 pages. A simple calculation shows that if new knowledge had continued to accumulate at the same rate, an additional 1,000 pages would have been required to provide an adequate appendix in the 1949 edition! Needless to say, Dr. Fieser, now joined by his wife, has not adopted such an expedient, but has written what is virtually a new book, and the authors are to be congratulated on having restricted the increase in the number of pages to just over 50 per cent. Three of the chapters in the second edition, dealing with the chemistry of phenanthrene, carcinogenic hydrocarbons and triterpenoid saponins, have now been omitted, as the substances discussed were, strictly speaking, either not natural products or not true phenanthrene derivatives. The chapter on sterols and bile acids has been expanded from 100 to 208 pages, whilst new chapters have been added on Adrenal Cortex Hormones, Steroid Metabolism and Steroid and Terpenoid Alkaloids. The fact that the chapters on sex hormones and cardiac glycosides have increased by only 10 pages each, although a large number of new compounds of both types are referred to, illustrates the drastic pruning that the older material has undergone in order that more recent discoveries may be adequately reviewed. Primarily, this is a text-book of advanced organic chemistry in a restricted branch of the subject which has grown so quickly that only the specialist can be expected to be fully conversant with the latest developments. Because it reviews the chemistry of so many substances of physiological significance and actual or potential therapeutic value, and because this information can only be obtained otherwise by a search of the original literature, the book is of outstanding importance to pharmacists and to chemists engaged in the pharmaceutical industry. They will appreciate particularly the sections on the therapeutic value of the different sex hormones, the pharmacological properties of the cardiac glycosides and aglycones and the physiological actions of the various cortical hormones; this last section is to be especially commended for its lucid treatment of a difficult subject and because it is of such topical interest. British readers may cavil at the price now asked for American text-books, and the Treasury at the dollar expenditure involved, but a book of this type must be regarded by the chemist as an essential tool of his profession and accorded a correspondingly high priority.

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