

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Perspectives in Organic Chemistry** (A commemorative volume dedicated to Sir ROBERT ROBINSON, O.M., F.R.S.) Edited by Sir ALEXANDER TODD, F.R.S. Interscience Publishers, New York and London, 1956. 525 pp., \$7.50.

FROM time to time there appear men who in their lifetime dominate their chosen subjects, by intellect, vigour and personality. Such a man is Robert Robinson who has become the leader of organic chemistry, first in the United Kingdom and subsequently throughout the world. It is peculiarly fitting that this volume should have been dedicated to him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday which was celebrated last year. In it eighteen leading organic chemists, many of them his former pupils, have presented a fitting tribute to a unique figure. In his editorial foreword Professor Todd expresses the hope that the authors may have provided something which will be acceptable to Sir Robert and may also be of interest to organic chemists in general. We may suspect that they have hit their first target, they certainly have their second.

There is no lack today of collections of monographs on topics in organic chemistry. What makes the present one peculiarly attractive is that in it the authors have been encouraged to be philosophical, reflective and even speculative. As a result they have managed to escape from the curse of comprehensiveness which besets so much of our literature.

The names of the authors are a sufficient witness to their standing in their fields: Pauling on Resonance Theory; Bartlett on Mechanism; Wilson Baker on Aromaticity; Barton on Stereochemistry; Prelog on Many-membered Rings; Birch on Biosynthesis; Woodward on Synthesis; Zeigler on Organometallic Synthesis; Hirst on Carbohydrates; Todd on Nucleic Acids; Ruzicka on Terpenes; Shoppee on Steroids; Schlittler on Alkaloids; Cornforth on Isotopes; Folkers on Micro-organisms; Walker on Chemotherapy; Erdtman on Conifer Taxonomy and Butenandt on Organic Chemistry and Genetics.

Naturally the treatment of the subjects has varied greatly, from Ruzicka's scholarly fifty pages on the terpenes to Pauling's vigorous eight on resonance. In general the articles fall into two broad classes, the reflective essay and the informed review. Some of the authors have been unable to shake themselves entirely free from the shackles of detail and documentation but the general effect is one of great readability rising at its best to elegance. Four of the articles are in German, the rest in English.

Throughout the book runs a recurrent refrain—"It is no longer possible to think of organic chemistry and biochemistry as essentially different subjects".

A few of the essays may be specially mentioned. Bartlett's judicial review of mechanisms has a calm and balanced tone and looks forward agreeably into the region of biological systems. Erdtman's essay on organic chemistry and conifer taxonomy will probably open a new and fascinating world to many chemists. Cornforth on Isotopes, Folkers on Micro-organisms and Walker on Chemotherapy have brought together much valuable information in a readily assimilable form. A special delight is the essay on Synthesis, because of its mastery, its elegance of phrase and the introduction (on page 179) into the scientific literature of the word "serendipitous". It is indeed a far cry from Horace Walpole to R. B. Woodward, but the English language is capable of all things.

The editor, authors and publishers are to be warmly congratulated on their tribute, which is adorned by an excellent colour photograph of the man they have so appropriately honoured.

R. P. LINSTAD