

ARNOLDIA REVIEWS

Allen, Mea, *The Hookers of Kew, 1785-1911*, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1967, 273 pp.

It was high time that someone wrote a good popular biography of Kew's illustrious Hookers, and Mea Allen has done it. Quite possibly some potential biographers were scared off by Leonard Huxley's excellent *Life and Letters of Sir J.D. Hooker*, for the younger Hooker was a gifted correspondent, and the record of his writings was complete enough to compose—mostly in his own words—what is still the liveliest and best account of his life. W. B. Turrill's 1963 effort on Sir Joseph's behalf was, to say the least, a disappointment. Meanwhile, the elder Hooker, Sir William Jackson, has been comparatively neglected and treated offhandedly as the famous father of a more famous son.

Miss Allen decided to handle both Hookers, as a team, in one volume. Considering the size and scope of their achievements she has done a remarkable job, for there are chapters in her biography that could justifiably be expanded to entire books. Because her control over the material and subject matter is judicious, she creates a well-balanced, fast-moving, and often entertaining personal history. Sir William obviously presented the author with research problems. She has painstakingly investigated obscure sources to piece together the story of his youth: from the time he collected a rare little moss through his association with Dawson Turner (his future father-in-law), his introduction to Sir Joseph Banks, his voyage to Iceland, his years as a teacher at Glasgow, his arrival at Kew, and his subsequent efforts to build that institution into one of the greatest botanical gardens of all times. There are moments when one wishes that Miss Allen either could or would indulge us with greater detail, but that might upset the balance of things.

Joseph, devoted to his father, followed in his footsteps and surpassed his achievements as a scientist. No one can describe his voyage to the Antarctic with the Ross expedition or his adventures in the Himalayas better than he did himself in letters and journals, but Miss Allen has done well with shorter accounts, for she has a gift of selecting the right amount of detail to keep the story alive even though it is abbreviated. Hooker's friendship with Darwin, his involvement with the *Origin of Species*, his desperate battles with the Government to save Kew, are also told this way. Personal and family matters run through the narrative, and the association between father and son is in constant focus even when Sir William is but a ghost.

If there is a negative criticism to be made it is that, since the Hooker family

was a large one, nieces, nephews and various in-laws keep cropping up in the text and the reader is hard put to identify them. Miss Allen tried to remedy the problem by supplying a genealogical chart in the back, but in so short a book some of the lesser characters could be omitted. The author did a great deal of scholarly research, and the more serious readers may wish that she had given a complete set of references for their use. But the casual reader, for whom the book was evidently written, will probably not miss them.

The Hookers of Kew is an excellent brief account of the long, productive lives of two of England's greatest botanists. Lovers of Kew, science, history, and exploration should welcome and enjoy it.

S. S.



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