

BOOK REVIEW

JIM ENDERSBY. 2008. **Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science.** (ISBN 978-0-226-20791-9, hbk.). The University of Chicago Press, 1427 East 60th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.press.uchicago.edu, 1-773-702-7000, 1-773-702-9756 fax). \$35.00, 429 pp., 49 halftones, 1 line drawing, 6" x 9".

In Jim Endersby's exposition of Joseph Hooker's role in shaping both 19th-century botanical science and the institutional development of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, it is immediately apparent that the key word of the title and indeed the entire book is "practices". The starting point for an understanding of scientific professionalism and its supporting institutions in 19th-century Britain lies, he argues, in neither transforming theory (e.g. Darwinian evolution) nor the new consciousness of professionalism usually attributed to a rising middle-class. It is rather in the pragmatic efforts of individuals determined to create a recognized, respectable place for science in Victorian society. For despite the very real gains made by British science over the preceding 150 years—gains attributable to individual genius, the 18th-century Enlightenment, and the tremendous interest in the natural world generated by Cook's voyages—"scientists" in the modern sense really did not exist at the onset of Queen Victoria's reign (1837). Gentlemen of independent means in the manner of Joseph Banks were still the best placed to pursue scientific inclinations.

For those who had to make a living, the route to financial security provided by a very limited number of positions in government or the nation's universities was both circuitous and precarious. This was particularly the case in the natural sciences that had no independent place in British schools and universities until the second half of the century. William Hooker, for example, despite the excellence of his own plant collections that had cost him most of his personal wealth, secured his place as regius professor of botany at the University of Glasgow only through the patronage of well-placed friends. Even after his appointment as Kew's first director he was hard-pressed to insure a future in science for his talented son Joseph.

When the younger Hooker succeeded his father as director at Kew in 1865, his principal challenge remained the establishment of a recognized, well-supported place in the public sphere for a scientific institution. If botanical science was to be as well regarded as the physical sciences, Hooker and his staff also needed to acquire the social standing that would enable them to impress on the political establishment and the British public Kew's role in national strength and well-being. "I am a *rara avis*," Hooker wrote, "a man who makes his bread by specific Botany, and I feel the obstacles to my progress as obstacles on my way to the butcher's and baker's. What is all very pretty play to amateur Botanists is death to me." (p.21) Much of what came to define Kew can be associated with this perception of the critical need to establish a sense of serious scientific and national purpose. Hooker's ban on picnics and bands in the garden's grounds, the insistence on accuracy and uniform practice among Kew's collectors, and the stress placed on Kew's importance for the economic development of the growing British empire all stemmed from Hooker's determination to win status, recognition and, above all, the public support that botanical science and its practitioners required.

Endersby's other critical insight is the connection he makes between Joseph Hooker's vision of Kew as an institution and the nature of botanical science itself. Separate chapters on classification, illustration, travel, collecting, correspondence, associations, and publishing identify the key components of the methodology of 19th-century botany. The most striking feature of a methodology based in a taxonomic approach to the world of plants is the degree to which that methodology depended on communication and uniformity of practice among men and women engaged in an increasingly global field study. Botany in isolation with its reference collection, publications, and systematic classification could hardly have sustained a claim to scientific legitimacy. Moreover, these methodological "necessities"—in an age when global empires facilitated global botanical possibilities—increasingly required an institutional scale and organization.

For readers with an interest in the history of science or in the growth and organization of institutions or for those simply intrigued with the insights and surprises the Victorians and their creations continue to yield, Endersby's clear and perceptive account is a "must read."—Sara H. Sohmer, *Dept. of History (retired), Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.*