products of wood industry. In my view the authors have achieved their objective of writing a useful up-to-date reference book for professional chemists, wood technologists and conceivably some final year undergraduates.

Professor Dervilla Donnelly
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Until quite recently the study of plant productivity was usually equated with crop yield in agriculture. On the other hand ecologists were also using the term as productivity was seen as a parameter often associated with competitive ability. Bringing the two different lines together has taken some time but a strong alliance is now in operation. In many ways the merger has been synergistic as each group has had something to contribute towards new conceptual developments. This volume is a spin-off from a workshop held in December 1988 in Utrecht and does give a feeling that progress is being made rapidly on a number of fronts. The index and cross references show that it has been well edited with thought given to a reader new to the subject, or trying to follow a particular line of enquiry.

The opening chapter works very well in defining the terms, explaining the jargon and introducing the concepts that follow. Another strong early emphasis is on phenotypic variation as a product of nutrient availability; this comes prior to details of interspecific variation. The coverage is exceptionally wide from the dependence of photosynthesis on nitrogen partitioning, the correlation of respiration and growth rate (including discussion of alternative respiratory pathways rarely encountered in physiology texts) to the ecological significance of secondary plant compounds. This latter subject should interest phycologists who may often have been asked to explain why plants make such an array of interesting, but strange, compounds. In fact any new postgraduate in any area of the plant sciences will find something useful and thought-provoking in this volume.

My only carp is with the title, but as this accurately describes what the book is about, I, like the editors, no doubt could not think of anything better.

School of Plant Sciences, University of Reading. J. D. Ross


Can one actually become addicted to dietary tannins? I had an aunt who drank over 30 cups of tannin-containing tea a day and many north country people specifically mash their tea so that it becomes a highly astringent brew. Julia Morton, in this book, would suggest that such addiction is harmful and may lead to a high risk of oesophageal cancer. Scientists can also become addicted to these substances, perhaps in a less harmful way. E. C. Bate-Smith and Tony Swain, two former colleagues of mine, spent much of their lives studying the natural distribution and function of these tannins. Eddie Haslam, having pioneered so much new tannin chemistry and also having written two books on the subject, must also be considered an addict. Again, Earl D. Bliss, in reviewing the role of tannins in producing leather, describes "the tanning profession as a disease that, once contracted, stays with you until death".

Considering the extent of tannin addiction, it is remarkable that no modern international symposium until now has dealt with these molecules which are at the same time chemically complex and biologically active. The two editors of this volume called together a number of international experts in Washington State, U.S.A. in August 1988 to debate the chemistry as well as the biological and commercial significance of the condensed tannins. This book records that debate in a series of interrelated chapters. These deal in turn with biogenesis, structure, analysis, reactivity, complexation, biological activity and commercial importance, with from three to six authors contributing to each section. It is a very fascinating read, even to the unaddicted. We can only look forward to the volume from the next symposium planned for 1991, which surely can only deal with the hydrolysable tannins in the same comprehensive, perceptive and revealing way.

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