

Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science, by Jim Endersby; pp. xii + 429. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008, \$35.00, £18.00.

Jim Endersby has written a remarkable, deeply researched, multidimensional study of Joseph Dalton Hooker and Victorian botanical science. The study does not claim to be a biography but rather consists of a series of in-depth thematic probes of Hooker's life as it stood embedded in the emerging scientific specialization of botany. These themes include traveling, collecting, corresponding, classifying, publishing, associating, and governing. In his conclusion Endersby writes,

Previous historians have left Hooker's life, his botanical practices, and his ideas buried under an avalanche of isms—professionalism, Darwinism, and colonialism. Once these are cleared away, we not only see Hooker more clearly but can also see how earning a living from the sciences, the reception of Darwin's work, and the way science was practiced in its colonial settings are all aspects of a richer picture of the diversity of nineteenth-century scientific practices and culture. (326–27)

In this respect, Endersby quite commendably attempts to present his subject and the entire Victorian botanical enterprise with as few historiographical presuppositions as possible. This goal leads him into several historiographical quarrels with previous historians—including this reviewer—which work toward greater clarity without, at the end of the day, necessarily meaning that the existing broad analytical categories can or should henceforth be eschewed.

What will draw the most admiration from readers of this excellent book is Endersby's consistent and patient effort to describe and analyze the actual work of a great Victorian man of science as he both extended the realm of natural knowledge and succeeded against many forces within the realms of Victorian science and politics to

establish botany as a field of recognized and socially respected scientific work. The particularity of Endersby's descriptions and analysis will recall Martin Rudwick's *The Great Devonian Controversy* (1985). Both books remind historians and instructors of the very difficult daily work of practitioners of Victorian science and the treacherous social landscape over which they trod and in which they attempted to carve out their own spheres of influence.

Endersby traces the enormous problems Hooker encountered simply in achieving a living adequate to support himself and then a family. He describes how William Jackson Hooker, Joseph's father, carefully created not only a position for himself at Kew Gardens but also amassed what amounted to a family annuity in the private herbarium he organized with the help of collectors around the world. Yet it was many years before he could actually provide a position for his son at Kew. What Endersby presents in the careers of both Hookers is Victorian scientific entrepreneurship: achieving personal scientific expertise in the initially modest field of botany, finding opportunities to travel for the purpose of collecting, then cultivating networks of local collectors throughout the world who were willing to send their materials to Kew, establishing good relations with Victorian men of science in other fields, and constantly negotiating political and bureaucratic challenges. Endersby contends that all the multifaceted elements of this kind of scientific career cannot simply be subsumed under the category of emerging professionalism.

Endersby also questions the frequent view of the Hookers and Kew Gardens as simply another element of British colonialism. There is no doubt in Endersby's account that Joseph Hooker saw himself as the dominant figure in a vast network of botanical collectors, but Endersby persuasively demonstrates that the local collectors had their own scientific agendas. Alongside his wonderfully informative descriptions of the practice of collecting botanical specimens, Endersby's most important conceptual point is that in his determination to delimit sharply the number of species (Hooker was a lumper in contrast to the local collectors' desire for splitting), he established himself as a powerful colonial centralizer. In the politics of species determination, imperial authority asserted itself over local botanical ambitions by finding similarities in specimens drawn from all over the world rather than seeing local regions as boasting their own worlds of distinct species. At the same time, that authority came into being only through years of careful, sensitive correspondence that took into account the concerns of local collectors.

Endersby builds upon this analysis to explain the various voices Hooker used to comment upon Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Hooker was a great friend of Darwin and embraced Darwin's theory. At the same time, in different publications Hooker stated varying degrees of support and enthusiasm. Endersby accounts for these differences by explaining that Hooker could not harm his relationship with collectors around the world who might not accept or fully understand Darwin's theory by championing it too forcefully. For Endersby, Darwin's theory and Hooker's practice of botany constantly presented him with intellectual and scientific political shoals to navigate in order for his science to receive expanding recognition and for his own career to prosper. Hooker—and after him Endersby—thus did not see Victorian science as a broad cultural force moving steadily into the future but rather as an enterprise consisting of scores of personal and institutional relationships, each of which had to be tended and considered in its own way as carefully as the fragile specimens of dried plants that arrived at Kew from around the world.

With this book Endersby has established himself as a strong voice among historians of Victorian science. His views will invite controversy while at the same time requiring other historians of the culture and practice of Victorian science to reconsider many of their existing presuppositions. This is a book to be read and pondered.

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