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Wilfrid Blunt. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.
256 pp. \$14.95.

Ronald S. Wilkinson
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BOOK REVIEW

THE COMPLEAT NATURALIST: A LIFE OF LINNAEUS. Wilfrid Blunt. New York: The Viking Press, 1971. 256 pp. \$14.95.

Not all historians agree thoroughly with Julius von Sachs' suggestion in the *Geschichte der Botanik* (1875) that the work of Carl von Linné marked the conclusion of an old epoch rather than the beginning of a new one, but it is true that most of Linnaeus' contributions were elaborations of the views of his predecessors. Except to historians of science, his sexual system of the classification of plants is all but forgotten. Yet as the grand nomenclator of the eighteenth century, and the regulator and popularizer (if not the innovator) of binomial nomenclature in biology, his place is secure in our memory.

There has not been a really thorough biography of Linnaeus since Theodor M. Fries' *Linné: Lefnadsteckning* (1903), adapted in English by Benjamin D. Jackson as *Linnaeus* (1923). Wilfrid Blunt's *The Compleat Naturalist* does not attempt to fill the need for an extensive modern study; this is rather a popularized biography and extensively illustrated table-book. Readers who recall Blunt's excellent *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (1950) will find the same blend of scholarship and visual appeal here. Linnaeus is presented in his varied aspects, from the explorer who endured hardship in his perigrination of Lapland (and thereafter enjoyed appearing upon occasion in Lapp costume), to the conceited scholar who could write of himself that "No one before him had pursued his profession with greater zeal and had more hearers; made more observations in natural history; had fuller insight into all the three kingdoms of Nature; been a greater botanist or zoologist...." Blunt gives us Linnaeus *en pantoufles*, and the result is delightful reading for anyone at all interested in the history of biology.

The multitude of illustrations, both color and black-and-white, leads to the only possible adverse criticism of the book; it is, if possible, over-illustrated, with some of the embellishments having only marginal relevance to the text. Errors of fact, such as the misquotation from von Sachs on page 10, are few. (von Sachs did not say that Linnaeus "never made a single important discovery throwing light on the nature of the vegetable or animal kingdom"; he restricted his observation to "the vegetable world", but might well have agreed with Blunt's version.) Historian of science William T. Stearn has contributed an appendix on Linnean classification, nomenclature, and method, which will serve as an excellent introduction to the subject.

Ronald S. Wilkinson
The Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540