

book reviews

The Ins and Outs of Breathing – How We Learnt about the Body's Most Vital Function

By Norman L Jones. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011. 284 pp. £17.95.

I enjoyed this book, and was left wondering who would read it – it deserves to be read. Norman Jones, emeritus professor of medicine at McMaster, trained at the Hammersmith in the early 1960s, and then moved to Canada as a founding member of that university's department of medicine: his academic career centred on respiratory physiology. In this book he merges the physiology of breathing, the biochemistry of respiration, the pathophysiology of respiratory disease, adaptation to the environment, and adaptation to human activities such as singing, running, diving and climbing, against a historical perspective. While that may sound a mannered approach, the author mixes the history of discovery with a history of the development of sci-

entific thought, the age of enlightenment, and biographies of both early and more recent scientists against the historical eras in which they lived. Vignettes abound – both written and illustrated, such as the recordings of elastic recoil during the singing of a Schubert song, an illustration of a 'more-or-less portable' apparatus for measuring oxygen uptake, and an account of Lavoisier's death during the post-revolutionary terror in Paris in 1794. However, it is not only the history but the science of classical respiratory physiology that is elegantly expressed. While the 'blurb' describes this as a layman's guide, students of physiology and medicine, both undergraduate and postgraduate, and indeed trainees and specialists in respiratory disease who might hope to temper science with the humanities would enjoy and learn from the book. It demonstrates that high quality explanations of science and medicine benefit from understanding the progression of thought, and that physiology and pathophysiology are enjoyable, as well as essential to modern medicine. As a final indication that it is not a fusty historical tome, it is available as an e-book (iUniverse.com).

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