Day light robbery. By Damien Downing. Arrow, London, 1988. 170 pp. £3.99.

Day light robbery, subtitled ‘The importance of sunlight’, is just not a book that I expected to read at this time. After all the publicity given to the College’s recent Report on the dangers of injudicious sun exposure and all of our attempts to make the public more aware of the links between skin cancer and solar irradiation it is surprising to see a publication preaching the opposite doctrine. Dr Damien Downing, a founder of the British Nutrition Society, is quite critical of orthodox medical advice in a number of areas, but in particular of our warnings about sunbathing.

The 16 chapters contain 143 pages devoted to a description of the supposed benefits of sun exposure. He believes that all of us in the UK are light-deficient and states that in order to avoid light deficiency most UK residents will need to travel abroad regularly or ‘to use artificial light.’ There is no doubt that his implied criticism of our failure to act on knowledge of the
physiology of Vitamin D synthesis with the resulting metabolic consequences has some basis in truth. But few would accept the suggestions that many of the aches and pains in the community are treatable with calcium supplements or sun exposure.

One of the chapters, entitled 'Invisible radiation' discusses a term previously unknown to this reviewer—biotabolism. It is suggested that not only do living tissues give off a form of radiation that influences other tissues but that UV energy induces tissues to produce more radiation.

Moderately contentious you many think. Yes, but probably not so contentious as the author's views on sun exposure and cancer. He believes that sun exposure can actually protect against most neoplastic disease and cites work published in 1915, stating that cancer mortality increases with the distance from the equator. He also quotes one uncontrolled study in which sunlight treatments seemed to improve and to halt the further spread of disease in 15 subjects with carcinomatosis. This is not the place for a detailed reflection of his beliefs in this area. Suffice to say, that those who try to swim against the tide of knowledge are in considerable danger of being intellectually drowned. It is not likely that many will be convinced by such anecdotes. Even the 196 references in the book are not very persuasive and many are more than 50 years old. Some are incomplete and some are unobtainable.

I suppose his chapter on 'Sex and sunshine' may excite more sympathy. For example there are few that will resist a sub-heading 'Family planning by sunshine', or such phrases as '... the bikini clad beauty may not be simply attracting male attention by her display of skin, she may also be giving the signal "my hormones are keyed up and ready for action"'

All in all, the book has the curious ability to excite both interest and disappointment. Interest, because it contains a wide-ranging description of the fundamentals of photobiology for the layman, but also disappointment because much of it is written from Dr Downing's own exotic viewpoint.

RONALD MARKS
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Medical aspects of anorexia nervosa. By S. Bhanji and D. Mattingly. Wright, London, 1988. 140 pp. £22.95.

About one in every 100 young women aged 15 to 24 years is likely to suffer from anorexia nervosa and four per cent from bulimia nervosa. Despite wider awareness of these conditions, these illnesses may still go unrecognised in women outside this age range or in the occasional case of a man. Of the two conditions, anorexia nervosa is the simpler to diagnose with its characteristic hallmarks of weight loss (at least 10 per cent below the expected body weight for age and height) and associated amenorrhea, whereas the binge-eating, self-induced vomiter with relatively normal body weight may be missed. The authors' objective in writing this slim textbook is to approach the medical problems of anorexia in a systematic way, there-