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her lunacy becoming a public problem” (p. 119). There are, as he forthrightly acknowledges, two essential limitations on his findings: they relate only to the rich, for whom alone the expense of a lunacy inquisition was either possible or desirable; and the data that have survived relate very largely to only the two decades between 1825 and 1845, immediately preceding the heyday of the asylum.

Melling, Forsythe, and Adair have been engaged on a long-term, Wellcome Trust funded study of lunacy in Devon. Their work (and it should be acknowledged, other work by Bartlett, Wright, and others not reported here) has given us a far more nuanced and complex portrait of the complexities that marked the interactions of families, Poor Law authorities, the community, and the asylum. Their paper in this volume, assessing crime, violence, and welfare in admissions to the Devon County asylum between 1845 and the outbreak of the First World War, is a useful extension of their earlier research, though hardly as path-breaking as earlier pieces they have written. Taken together, this body of work, appearing over the last half-dozen years or so, has indeed greatly enriched our understanding of the complexities of madness and its management in the Victorian age. It would be a gross overstatement, however, to suggest that it has succeeded in dislodging the asylum from its central place in the psychiatric history of that period.

Overall, then, this collection is of extremely variable quality. Several of the essays it contains are worth the attention of specialists; many are not. As a whole, the volume fails to hold together as a coherent book. Nor, I am afraid, does it constitute the kind of innovative and pathbreaking contribution to the historiography of psychiatry that the editors claim for it.

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**Alastair Johnson** (ed.), *The diary of Thomas Giordani Wright, Newcastle doctor, 1826–1829*, Publications of the Surtees Society, vol. 206, Woodbridge, Surtees Society and Boydell Press, 2001, pp. xiv, 366, £40.00, US\$70.00 (hardback 0-85444-045-3).

Some twenty years ago I spent several months hunting through county record offices and libraries for manuscript and published records of general medical practice between 1750 and 1850. I found far more than I had imagined I would, including some extensive manuscripts; but for richness of social and medical detail I found nothing that came anywhere near this work, the diary of Thomas Giordani Wright. For anyone like me with an interest in medical practice in provincial England in the first half of the nineteenth century, this diary is the most magnificent source I have seen.

Wright, who died aged ninety in 1898, spent most of his life in Wakefield where he became a moderately distinguished physician. But the diary starts in 1824 when, at the age of sixteen, he was apprenticed to a surgeon-general practitioner in Newcastle upon Tyne: and the diary covers his next five years, first as an apprentice and then as an assistant. Wright was an ambitious lad, proud of his work, optimistic, and, as befitted a professional gentleman, he was a bit of a fussy dresser. He was fond of the girls, and fond of music (his father was a musician and Thomas played the flute and had a go at composing), fond of dancing and going to the theatre, and fond of reading widely, including medical periodicals and medical texts in French as well as English. As a young man keen to make his mark as a writer (hence the diary), he built up a library of his own and was immensely proud to be elected to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne.

As one would expect from a diarist so

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young, there are purple patches and youthful vanities in his writing. Not for him the advice of Samuel Johnson to the effect that if ever you write a passage of which you are particularly proud, strike it out. For all that, the diaries are very readable and one grows fond of young Wright as he records every conceivable detail of his hopes and ambitions, what he had to eat, how he dressed for various occasions, and how he spent most of his days visiting patients on horseback with all the hazards, troubles and occasional joys of this form of transport. Much of his practice was amongst the mining villages which suffered from a horrifying number of serious accidents. He is at his best when describing how he dealt with such surgical cases and I have learnt more about the ordinary everyday work of a provincial surgeon in the 1820s from this diary than from any other source. He was much less confident when dealing with medical cases. From the way he writes, I have little doubt that he was, incidentally, unusually kind and considerate to his patients.

It was customary for apprentices on a five-year apprenticeship to spend a "session" attending lectures and demonstrations at a medical school. Wright went to Edinburgh for this purpose and his account of what he did and what he saw is fascinating.

The diary was written as a series of separate volumes, which turned up in British Columbia and were donated to the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. A few of the volumes were missing but a new one has just been found, too late, sadly, to be included in this book. But I hope it may appear as a separate paper.

Alastair Johnson has done a considerable service to the history of medicine by the long and arduous work of transcribing this diary, by his excellent introduction and detailed but unobtrusive editing and footnoting, and an excellent index. For those who love the primary sources of

medical history this really is a gem of a book.

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**Gabrielle Hatfield, *Memory, wisdom and healing: the history of domestic plant medicine*, Thrupp, Sutton Publishing, 1999, pp. ix, 209, illus., £25.00, US\$36.00 (0-7509-1945-0).**

Gabrielle Hatfield has gathered together an extraordinarily valuable resource pertaining to domestic medicine in Britain from around 1700 to the present. Her book mainly covers folk knowledge of plant remedies, much of it passed down by word of mouth. Unable completely to discard the printed tradition which provides records of many of her sources, she concentrates on fragments of poetry, proverbs, recipe books, songs and evidence of vernacular practice as written by the educated about the uneducated. The intention, as she states in the introduction, is to provide some account of the ordinary do-it-yourself medicine practised by the ordinary person in Britain. This is not an easy task and she is to be congratulated on the intelligent synthesis she has managed to supply.

The history of domestic medicine has largely been ignored precisely because of the difficulty of collecting adequate materials. It takes a determined historian to pursue the self-treatment of ill-identified conditions by herbs invariably described in a local vernacular. Once collected, there are the difficulties of collating disparate, mainly anecdotal data distributed over a broad geographical territory and timespan. Hatfield's account is full of proper scholarly caution. She is currently a Wingate Scholar at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and formerly was a Wellcome research fellow at the University of East Anglia, researching domestic plant remedies for which she won