

## Book Reviews

meetings with the Pope, do not differ much from similar reflections by other Nobel laureates, richly illustrated as they are.

Nearly a third of the book is devoted to Weller's experiences and achievements in tropical medical research. The blurb tells us that he "organized studies of tropical diseases, and the training of physicians and other health professionals in the field of tropical diseases"—what he himself refers to as 'Developing Young Scientists'—during population-based studies of schistosomiasis and Chagas' disease. In spite of clinical descriptions of these diseases, there are again no historical references. Even in the case of *Schistosoma mansoni*, with the well-known diagram of its life-cycle, there is no mention anywhere of either Patrick Manson or Robert Leiper and their lives' work on the disease, conducted in the early decades of the twentieth century at Manson's pioneer School of Tropical Medicine in London, and in Egypt during the First World War. The only reference to the School in the book's index and text is in connection with the 'Harvard–Wellcome Brazil Project'—according to Weller a success at the Harvard end, with the establishment of a field station in Salvador, Brazil, but less so in the case of the London School. The latter partial failure may be ascribed to "local academic politics in Brazil", which had become only too evident to Weller and to the project administrator, one Dr Richard Morrow, on their first arrival there. University politics also included a language problem, manifest in anti-Pan American Health Organization attitudes, largely because senior PAHO representatives assigned there spoke only Spanish and no Portuguese—a not unusual problem in Latin-American politics.

Some readers may feel rather overwhelmed by the personal style of this book. The number of paragraphs, and even sentences, beginning with "I" almost defy counting—but then this is after all an autobiography, and the author has been involved in a wide variety of important biomedical experiments that deserve recognition over a long lifetime. His reminiscences should provide inspiration for

coming generations in clinical and experimental medicine.

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**Willem de Blécourt and Cornelia Usborne** (eds), *Cultural approaches to the history of medicine: mediating medicine in early modern and modern Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. xxiii, 241, £50.00 (hardback 1-4039-1569-5).

Moving away from outmoded theories of "medical imperialism", this collection seeks to reconstruct the "complex web of communications and re-configurations" in medical history. Addressing issues as diverse as heart dissection, masturbation, animal care, hermaphroditism and orthopaedics, in Europe between the 1600s and the present, it uses the concept and role of "mediation" to explore theories of sickness and healing. As identified by Roy Porter's foreword, the contributors seek to isolate the meanings of medical knowledge and expectations, rather than relying on filter-down or Foucauldian approaches to the development of modern medicine. Each of the essays claims to offer images of medical knowledge and practice that are more "rich", "complex" or "comprehensive" than those currently in vogue. The eclectic range of subjects studied is promising, though its successes are mixed.

Several contributors focus on "mediation" in terms of the construction and circulation of medical knowledge between texts and audiences, and between patients, practitioners and the wider community. Thus Louise Hill Curth draws parallels between human and animal medical theory and treatment to demonstrate the importance of "one medicine" in the humoral tradition. Micheline Louis-Courvoisier and Sèverine Pilloud, and Michael Stolberg use the extensive archival resources of the Genevan doctor Samuel Auguste Tissot. The former contributors focus on the formal and contextual composition of the letters and examine the social embeddedness of healing concepts. Michael

Stolberg's account takes direct issue with the themes of "popularization" and "public understanding" that have become so central to medical history. Yet the stated aim of Stolberg's piece—to understand the impact of medical advice literature on the lay readership, rather than simply taking for granted that "dominant medical discourse will automatically be accepted"—is surely a standard objective of modern medical history research.

A more promising approach to letters is suggested by Alfons Zarzoso's account of lay decisions over medical care and treatment in eighteenth-century Catalonia. That self-medication and advice from relatives and friends was commonplace during the period is well-known. Less extensively studied is the vocabulary of afflictions, and the accommodation of illness and disease within a specific socio-economic and political climate. In letters attributing disease to the localized impact of French Revolutionary disruption, rumour and fear became vocabularies for the transmission of disease theories.

The remaining essays focus more explicitly on the problems of competing truth-claims and the limits of medical authority. Yarah Bar-On draws on the memoirs of Louise Bourgeois to explore the functioning of medical knowledge as a form of "gossip". Claims to (and the limits of) medical certainty is also addressed by Palmira Fontes da Costa and Constance Malpas. Logie Barrow's story of nineteenth-century English vaccination shows how debates over medical authority did not take place in a vacuum, being embedded in (or mediated by?) wider political and social debates. This was no less so in earlier times, as illustrated by Catrien Santing's article on the heart in Counter-Reformation Italy.

The remaining articles by Hera Cook and Toin Pieters on twentieth-century issues highlight the conflicts between individual desires for health- (or self-)improvement, and available medico-scientific resources. Each writer shows how the medical world responds with varying degrees of success to the needs and demands of the lay public. We are back to the theme of community participation in the world of the sick. In the

modern age, however, that means taking account of, and using, a global media amidst the hum of rising public expectations about medical ability and advance.

The revision of concepts like "mediation" is doubtless important to the expansion of meaning in medical history. It draws attention to what Zarzoso calls "medical pluralism", and the historically-complex rituals of medical knowledge and practice. Yet the theoretical potential of "mediation" remains uncertain. Although the editors try to stabilize the term by focusing on the themes of transmission and reconciliation, its potential for generalization arguably disrupts influence and agency.

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**Franck Collard and Évelyne Samama**

(eds), *Mires, physiciens, barbiers et charlatans. Les marges de la médecine de l'Antiquité au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Langres, Dominique Guéniot, 2004, pp. 178, €22.90 (paperback 2-87825-277-2).

The University of Reims has recently embarked upon a series of meetings to examine social aspects of medicine in the pre-modern period from Classical Antiquity down to the seventeenth century. Earlier volumes have looked at ideas on contagion, and on the actual practice of medicine, whether in surgery or in the treatment of poisons. The third meeting was devoted to the margins of medicine, to the relationship between those who called themselves (or were called) doctors and those who might be termed leeches, barbers, and even charlatans.

This is a wide theme, well suited to a comparison between different societies and medical cultures. So, for instance, there are papers on sixteenth-century Mexico (Bernard Grunberg) and fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Milan (Marilyn Nicoud), alongside very detailed examination of specific authors such as Cicero (Sophia Conte), Scribonius Largus, fl. AD 47