

Book Reviews

on Sir John Simon and the author's own work on government intervention in health matters in the nineteenth century.

Although it is no criticism of the contents of the book, the title is apt to mislead in two ways. First, the history is really of modern public health since the mid-eighteenth century. A mere fifteen pages, out of a total of two hundred and nine, hardly constitutes even a short history of public health for all recorded time up to 1750. Second, the term public health has been interpreted in the widest sense of social medicine; thus much of the valuable and detailed matter of the second section of the book is on legislation concerning building, care of children and lunacy.

On questions of fact there is little to criticize, but a couple of points of interpretation are worth raising. It is hardly fair (pp. 26-27) to imply that it was due to the politicians, who ignored the arguments of doctors, that improvements in public health were adopted so slowly. Medical opinion after all was bitterly divided between the rival 'contagionist' and 'miasmatic' schools; and when doctors were put in positions of authority, as under the 1774 Act to regulate London mad-houses and on the Boards of Health in 1805 and 1831, little was achieved. It needed the drive of the politically conscious lawyer-administrator Edwin Chadwick, who disdained the medical profession, to bring in reform. Whatever Chadwick's faults, and they were many, is it fair to blame him for the predicament at the Local Government Board in which Simon found himself in 1871, nearly twenty years after Chadwick's retirement?

Finally, on the question of the general handling of the theme of the development of public health, it is surely not unreasonable to expect some basic statistics. No uninformed person reading this history could estimate the impact of all the reforms and discoveries enumerated. The cutting of the mortality rate from about 40 to about 12 per thousand is, when all is said and done, what this book is about.

R. S. ROBERTS

A Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, by A. Z. ISKANDAR, London, The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967, pp. xvi, 256, 36 plates, inc. 2 col. plates, £10. 10s. 0d.

An adequate assessment of the medieval Arabic contribution to medicine depends on an exhaustive survey of the extant manuscripts; the need for such a survey has been long felt, but its fulfilment has been hampered by the scarcity of scholars possessing the necessary equipment of both a sound knowledge of medical history and a training in the intricacies of medieval Arabic manuscripts. Dr. Iskandar is one of the very few people to combine these skills, and scholars have reason to be grateful to the Wellcome Trust both for having enabled him to catalogue their very important collection, and for having produced the catalogue (printed by the Oxford University Press) in such a handsome form.

The catalogue describes, with full bibliographical references and indexing, 245 works contained in 197 volumes; and the admirably produced plates form an extremely valuable repertoire of medieval Arabic scripts. These points may perhaps be of more interest to Arabists than to readers of this journal, but what will be of interest to the latter is Dr. Iskandar's lengthy Introduction, which he prefaces with the observation: 'A number of the Arabic manuscripts in the Wellcome collections demand

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rather more detailed treatment than is possible within the scope of a normal catalogue entry. In order to authenticate the texts and describe them accurately it has often been necessary to make an intensive study of the Wellcome manuscripts with other copies preserved elsewhere. This study has brought to light a great deal of interesting and important information'.

In this Introduction, Dr. Iskandar gives a critical account of the relationship between Rhazes' *Continens* and *Canon* (including a complete analysis of the *Continens*), and a description of the often important commentaries on Rhazes' work; together with 'a study of some other works of particular interest'. All this makes a valuable contribution to the history of Arab medicine.

So little work has hitherto been done on writings of this kind that it is no discredit to Dr. Iskandar, who is a virtual pioneer in it, to say that his translations of the Arabic passages which he quotes can be improved in some details. It would be hardly appropriate in this journal to discuss these points fully, but it may suffice to place in parallel columns his English and the amended version which I would propose; Arabists who glance at the original texts will be able easily to grasp the point involved.

Iskandar

(P.4) A skilful physician aids Nature . . . and increases its precision in detecting and repelling any harm which he might not be aware of.

Nature should first expel superfluities . . . it adopts suitable methods to bring about expulsion through other channels. Nature removes the disorders of bones, expels the barbs of arrows . . .

a variety of foods which they take in small quantities

(p.6) administer one to a patient

An incomplete crisis modifies the periods of the disease and makes physicians unaware of their bodily effect.

(p.10) do not try to eliminate pus

cooling and repelling drugs

In addition to these points, I am not at all sure that Dr. Iskandar's rendering of the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 6 'A strong man with abundance of humours', although it makes good sense, can really be extracted from the Arabic; but as the MS. is defective at this point, it would be a matter of some difficulty to restore a satisfactory text.

Beeston

A skilful physician aids Nature . . . and achieves an instinctive appreciation of its power to repel harm.

Nature very obviously expels superfluities . . . it adopts the most subtle method to bring about expulsion through another channel, so that it can bring about expulsion through the interstices of the bone structure or even through the bone structure itself, so as to expel the barbs of arrows . . .

the fact that they rarely partake of elaborate foods

administer one to a patient who can bear it

An unskilful physician confuses the periods of the disease and does not perceive [read *yash'uru*] their bodily effects.

beware of inhibiting the coction of the pus.

cooling and inhibiting drugs

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The Arabic texts are in general admirably printed, but there seems to be a misprint on p.7 line 14, where for *hl* one should read *khalli*.

A. F. L. BEESTON

- (i) *Westminster Hospital, 1716—1966*, by J. G. HUMBLE AND P. HANSELL, London, Pitman Medical Publishing Co., 1966, pp. x, 134, illus., 21s. (ii) *Geschichte des Hospitals*, Bd. 1: *Westdeutschland von den Anfängen bis 1850*, by D. JETTER (*Sudhoffs Archiv*, Beiheft 5), Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1966, pp. viii, 270, 104 illus., DM. 66 or 74.

These two books could hardly be more different. Dr. Humble's is based on a course of lectures which he refers to rather disarmingly as his 'meanderings'. Nevertheless it will be welcomed and appreciated for the lively way in which it presents the Westminster's history, and there will be much admiration for the skilful interspersions of Mr. Hansell's photographs amongst the text.

Dieter Jetter's book is much more ambitious and does him nothing but credit. It is comprehensive, thorough and systematic, well documented (the bibliography contains 815 items) and based on much solid research in archives (the numerous illustrations include many plans and engravings found in these repositories). All this is worthy of praise. Impressive also is the author's concern to place hospitals in their authentic social setting. He constantly refers us to events which shaped the motives of hospital-founders or affected the evolution of hospitals.

There are those, apparently, who still need convincing of the contribution which medical history can make to a student's education. Such people ought to read Jetter's book (perhaps, one day, there will be an English version), for it expands one's horizons in most unexpected ways. It is, in fact, a road into the humanities.

To take examples from four areas of human activity.

- (i) *Architecture*. The plans and engravings assembled by Jetter are an education in themselves, covering as they do several centuries of architectural styles. Many of these hospitals can still be seen and one might easily arrange a holiday around visits to a few of them; e.g. the baroque 'Heilig-Geist' hospital at Fulda (founded 1729), Nördlingen's thirteenth-century foundation, and Celle's former madhouse-cum-prison (1710) where the inscription above the door reads 'This state-supported house is dedicated to the punishment of evildoers and the supervision of the deranged'. (ii) *Economics*. Jetter never tires of reminding us (cynically, perhaps, but with no little justification) of the mixed motives in the minds of certain hospital-founders. In this respect he mentions the 30 Years War and its aftermath of devastated lands and depopulated territories. After repopulation came the need to maintain good health, for productivity was no less important then than today. (iii) *Religion*. Again Jetter loves to lay motives bare and nowhere more aptly does he do this than when he describes Germany's finest sixteenth-century hospital, at Würzburg, founded by the Bishop von Mespelbrunn as a 'bulwark against Luther and Calvin' and as a sort of prepayment for the salvation of his soul—'In praee pauperum spem habui'. (iv) *Government*. Jetter relates how an obsession with the need to maintain public order led many rulers to lump 'lunatics' and 'criminals' in almost the same category and to