

Book Reviews

ALLEN G. DEBUS (editor), *Medicine in seventeenth century England*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1974, 8vo, pp. xiii, 485, illus., £8.50.

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A symposium has some merits but more disadvantages, and this collection of papers in honour of the late C. D. O'Malley is no exception to this generalization. Ideally a symposium gives scholars an opportunity to distil the quintessence of their deep labours and offer the grateful reader a succinct, savoury summary. Several of these essays fulfil this criterion, beginning with Lester S. King's lucid account of the transformation of Galenism under the seventeenth-century impact of corpuscular philosophy particularly well illustrated through the works of Robert Boyle. Another excellent summary based on much research is that of Allen G. Debus on the application of Paracelsian medicine in England as traced through the reformist writings of Noah Biggs' *The vanity of the craft of physick* (1651). James H. Cassedy's useful contribution on 'Medicine and the use of statistics' illuminates Graunt's work on the bills of mortality which swept away several seventeenth-century misconceptions. The commonest cause of death, for example, was "consumptions and coughs", and not the plague, which occupied fourth place. Graunt's analysis of the causes of death reveal that those due to the stone were decreasing while mortality from the gout remained steady, and after 1630, rickets entered the field as a "new" disease. Here we have an example of Bacon's injunction to count, measure and weigh data before drawing meaningful conclusions from them. But probably the best example of a summary based on deep scholarship is to be found in Rupert Hall's 'Medicine and the Royal Society'. He begins by studying the chemical remedies of Boyle and Willis in relation to corpuscular philosophy, and goes on to discuss the interpretation of physiological phenomena in terms of physio-chemical theories, in particular, the explosive theory of muscular contraction as expounded by Croone and Willis. Hall then probes the limitations of the experimental approach to medicine by means of blood transfusion experiments and various injection techniques and convincingly argues that knowledge was then too frail, and the basic research concepts non-existent, to support such sophisticated inquiries. Hall distinguishes between the activities of the Fellows of the Royal Society and the history of that institution: he then lucidly discusses the relationship between the somewhat parochial activities of the College of Physicians and the international links of the Royal Society forged by the indefatigable industry of its secretary, Henry Oldenburg, over whose enormous correspondence Rupert and Marie Boas Hall have long devoted the fruits of their scholarship.

These contributions all bear the stamp of authenticity, based as they are on sound, original research. But turning to A. H. T. Robb-Smith's paper on 'Cambridge medicine', our initial criterion has been cast aside. It was really quite unfair to invite one of the leading authorities on Oxford medicine to write about Cambridge, and Robb-Smith himself promptly acknowledges his indebtedness to the writings of Dr. Arthur Rook. But extracts of quaint and amusing archaisms are no substitute for

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historical analysis. And when discussing the neglected contributions of Henry Power, for example, Robb-Smith omits his most important experimental work anticipating Boyle's Law (though perhaps not realizing its full implications) as has been demonstrated by Webster (1965). Robb-Smith then confuses the Sydenham brothers: it was Colonel William Sydenham, a founder of the Protectorate and one of Cromwell's grandees, who was treated by Dr. Coxe. In any event, Thomas Sydenham had more connexions with Oxford than Cambridge: he had been a medical student at Magdalen Hall before and after the Civil War and was later elected to a Fellowship at All Souls.

Another advantage of a symposium, which was not even attempted in this volume, is the opportunity it offers to weave an interdisciplinary pattern by relating medicine and science to political, military, theological, economic and social aspects of the seventeenth century. Instead medicine is studied in terms of various modern and totally artificial specialities such as pathology, embryology, endocrinology and paediatrics. This implies a criticism of the planning of the symposium rather than the contributors, whose essays make interesting reading in spite of the fact that their appeal tends to be limited to historians of medicine and science. In a well-argued paper L. J. Rather shows overwhelmingly that Willis had a better understanding of pathology than Sydenham. But Sydenham actually ignored pathology: he not only disregarded microscopic observations but actually condemned them, and he also made a point of never turning up at necropsies. Indeed, Sydenham looked upon pathology as being totally irrelevant to his self-limited task of treating the sick: he would have saved Rather much effort by readily entering a plea of "No Contest"! Samuel X. Radbill offers an informative essay on seventeenth-century and earlier authors who wrote on diseases of children; and Hans Simmer wisely concludes his study of endocrinology by stating that Willis and Lower merely modified Galen's concepts of gonadal function, and that their too vague notions of hormones were, in fact, just a mixture of various "ferments" allied to corpuscular philosophy. Charles Bodemer examines neo-Platonic influences in embryology, while Kenneth Keele deftly surveys the physiological experiments of the pioneers of the Royal Society; his passage on Bacon's physiological influence is particularly good. But A. White Franklin's essay on clinical medicine ranges over too vast a field. He attempts to present too many facets by discussing under separate sections medical education, the iatrochemistry of John Floyer, the chemical physicians, Thomas Willis as a iatrochemist, Robert Fludd as a mystic, Thomas Sydenham, therapeutics, the incidence of diseases, Sir Theodore de Mayerne, John Radcliffe, and finally the writings of the quack William Salmon. Obviously his canvas is much too wide, and a symposium should be either a study in depth or an attempt to inter-relate various disciplines.

Turning to the obvious drawbacks of any symposium, the lack of originality must rank high, as there is usually insufficient time available to indulge in leisurely research. Another problem is the tendency to repetition, and this volume contains several examples of both. When discussing the development of anatomy and medicine at Oxford and Cambridge, A. H. T. Robb-Smith, H. M. Sinclair and Frances Valadez tend to overlap. But Leo M. Zimmerman's essay on surgery is marred, not only by a total lack of originality, but by the tedious repetition of a whole series of potted biographies including a totally irrelevant one of William Harvey.

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These blemishes aside, the book is well produced and is appropriately prefaced by a sympathetic *vita* of the late Professor C. D. O'Malley by Lynn White *jr.*, and ends with a vast bibliography of his writings compiled by Martha Teach Gnudi.

Inevitably this volume invites comparison with *The intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century* edited by Charles Webster and reviewed in this journal by Andrew Cunningham (*Med. Hist.*, 1975, 19: 202). Although these essays are more professional and more penetrating, medicine and science are discussed only briefly, and always secondarily to either politics, economics, philosophy, or religion: there is a pretentious reluctance to descend to the so-called "technical" aspects of the intellectual revolution which is its only lasting legacy. Vast space is devoted to millenarism and aspects of puritan eschatology, and a hard day's play produces the inevitable draw. There is a lack of the odd swashbuckling player while too many sound defenders have to put up with hostile, short-pitched bowling which may well have received an editorial caution. But we must remember the professionals play it hard. There is no agreement, for example, on the definition of puritanism, and the pioneers of the Royal Society have been variously described as being predominantly puritan, latitudinarian, or Anglican. Nevertheless, these two extreme approaches are, in some ways, complimentary and help to bridge the gap until a comprehensive account of seventeenth-century medicine becomes available. Perhaps this could best be achieved by joint authorship involving a seventeenth-century historian with a specialist on the history of medicine and science?

ARNOLD H. TAYLOR, *American diplomacy and the narcotics traffic, 1900–1939. A study in international humanitarian reforms*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1969, 8vo, pp. ix, 370, (no price stated).

Narcotic drug addiction is one of America's most difficult and complex problems, and since the beginning of the present century it has been involved in endless negotiations aimed at promoting a comprehensive treaty system of international drug control. Unfortunately, although states may wish to suppress drug abuse in their own territories for humanitarian and other reasons, on the international scene political and economic benefit may accrue from taking the opposite kind of action.

Professor Taylor's book is one of the best dealing with the international aspects of addiction control and has not been improved upon since its appearance in 1969. He deals with the opium problem in nineteenth-century America and the origins in the same century of the international movement to control narcotics. American contributions to the opium problem in China were extensive and are considered in detail here. But America, as well as other Western nations, also had the vice to deal with, and their international dealings were complicated by political attitudes. By World War II international control was in operation, America having played a prominent role in its creation.

This book is a scholarly and detailed analysis of international relations and humanitarian endeavour. It can be strongly recommended to those dealing with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social medicine, with drug addiction, and with political aspects of social reform.