

Book Reviews

RUTH LEYS, *From sympathy to reflex: Marshall Hall and his opponents*, repr. with a new preface of 'Alison versus Hall: aspects of the formation and reception of the reflex concept in Britain', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1976, New York and London, Garland, 1990, pp. 549, \$100.00 (0-8240-0042-0).

Leys is right in lamenting the dearth of research on the history of neurophysiology in early nineteenth-century Britain and this publication—a xeroxcopy of her 1976 Ph.D. thesis with a brief additional Preface but also with a change of title—represents a useful contribution to the literature. It is a pity that the original and more appropriate title—*Alison versus Hall: aspects of the formation and reception of the reflex concept in Britain*—has not been retained since the interesting figure of W. P. Alison, whom she has been at pains to retrieve from relative obscurity and who rather than Marshall Hall is her leading man in this work, is not readily suggested by the new title.

Although Leys makes reference to the controversies associated with Hall's concept of reflex action, she does not analyse the highly significant in-fighting and debate within the Royal Society, the institution above all others in which Hall sought acceptance and success. Furthermore, whilst Hall was active in the early days of the British Medical Association, he was never aggressively political, being more concerned with promoting and preserving his own scientific reputation.

Despite Hall's sometimes exaggerated opinion of the value of his own work on neuroscience, even he never, as this book does, claimed to have discovered reflex action. Hall was well aware of the relevant work of predecessors and saw his major contribution as one of linking, within a common framework, a range of hitherto disparate physiological phenomena recognisable today as reflex actions. As Leys makes clear, he presented a mechanistic explanatory model which, contrary to the prevailing view, excluded the soul and even more importantly excluded sensation as a necessary concomitant.

The work shows a pleasing familiarity with much of the relevant literature, and will be a valuable resource for other researchers in the field.

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ROY PORTER, *Doctor of society: Thomas Beddoes and the sick trade in late-Enlightenment England*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. x, 238, £40.00 (0-415-04850-8)

In his recent trilogy on the "long eighteenth century", Roy Porter portrayed, with apparent enthusiasm, a medical market-place in which the consumer could choose between a variety of practitioners, all equally entrepreneurial, bolstered by a shared knowledge of medicine that spanned the boundaries of lay and professional, elite and popular. Such a picture, painted with Porter's perennial panache, could appeal to a range of contemporary interests, ranging from anti-professional groups to advocates of a customer-led reform of the National Health Service. Porter himself has always urged caution about such uses of medical history: the doctors and patients of that consumer society were largely helpless in the face of disease and there was much to criticize in Georgian medicine. Yet, in the necessary task of rescuing that period from caricatures of corruption and intellectual torpor, the emphasis was generally positive. Now, through the medium of Thomas Beddoes, Porter has brought his reservations centre stage. Since Beddoes and his Bristol milieu have been thoroughly described recently by Dorothy Stansfield, Trevor Levere, Michael Neve and Mary Fissell, the author feels free to concentrate on Beddoes' analysis of the doctor's dilemma in consumer society. He offers us a passionate critique of medicine around 1800 and, surely, thereafter. For once the questions in the publisher's blurb: "why is modern society so sick?" and "should doctors be involved in politics?", seem in reasonable accord with the author's intentions.

Porter sees Beddoes' England facing a crisis of modernity, a modernity that was generating a whole new range of sicknesses, many of them iatrogenic (hence the 'sick trade' of the sub-title). Through Beddoes, he describes the paradoxes facing any doctor seeking to put medicine to the

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service of radical political aims. Advances in wealth and a consumerist attitude to life had created pathological life-styles and addicted people to false medicine. Entrepreneurialism had rendered doctors complicit, finding their own gain in society's sickness. Only a few disenchanting radicals, like Beddoes, were prepared to step back and offer a scientific diagnosis, and they were not only marginalized by the conservative backlash, but fatally divided. Some saw the answer in returning knowledge, and hence power, to the people: a democratic medicine. But Beddoes, like others, had learnt to distrust the people: only the enlightened physician with an outlook formed by the natural sciences (in his case, chemistry) could be trusted to know what was best. Here Porter seems least happy with Beddoes' analysis—after all, like Beddoes, he is a committed and highly effective popularizer of his views on medicine.

Porter points the paradox, yet because it seems to him perennial, fails to offer the reader the detail of Beddoes' own life and times that might explain his deepening distrust. Indeed, the book lacks the flavour of Georgian life usually so strong in Porter's books, despite, or perhaps because of, the lengthy quotations from Beddoes. Notwithstanding Porter's enthusiasm for Beddoes as a writer and "anthropologist" of his times, this reviewer found Beddoes less stimulating than Porter—even a Porter clearly striving not to outdo his subject in eloquence. A more clinical dissection of both the intellectual and social formation of his views, and how original they were, would deepen our appreciation of Beddoes as a doctor of his own society. Nevertheless, this book supplies an essential dimension to Porter's vision both of the period he has made his own and of his own work as a medical historian.

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ALLEN G. DEBUS, *The French Paracelsians: the chemical challenge to medical and scientific tradition in early modern France*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. xvi, 247, illus., £40.00, \$59.95 (0-521-40049-X).

This book is the first since Metzger's (1923) to give an account of the chemical philosophy in early modern France and, unlike its predecessor, it is richly contextual. Professor Debus not only provides a detailed analysis of the published work of French Paracelsians, but also carefully charts the manner in which the chemical philosophy was received and assimilated by the medical establishment. The fate of the chemical philosophy in Catholic France is clearly shown to have been very different from its progress in Protestant Germany and England. While the French court, especially in the reign of Henri IV, and the Montpellier medical faculty showed a certain sympathy for Paracelsian ideas, the pivotal Paris faculty, backed up by the Paris Parlement, was relentlessly hostile until the mid seventeenth century. Even then it was the chemists' drugs, not their philosophy, which gained acceptance in the capital.

Much of the establishment's animus against Paracelsianism came from its Protestant connections. Montpellier was a largely Protestant faculty before 1685 and most French Paracelsians were Huguenots or converts such as Théophraste Renaudot. In the era of the Counter Reformation, Catholic physicians and natural philosophers carefully distanced themselves from a set of ideas tainted with heresy. Nevertheless, the French chemical philosophers were never silenced and Debus emphasizes that followers of Paracelsus and van Helmont could still be found in the first half of the eighteenth century. By then the establishment was dominated by a new medical orthodoxy, iatromechanism, whose supporters were just as hostile to iatrochemical ideas. What ultimately caused the demise of the chemical philosophy in France was the development of a new conception of the purpose of chemistry. The Paracelsian tradition emphasized that chemistry and medicine were indissolubly connected. Stahl was the founding father of a new chemical science which stressed that the domain of the chemist was the inorganic realm. Thereby the way was open for the growth of chemistry as a discrete science and the chemical revolution of the late eighteenth century.

Debus's book is clearly written, carefully researched, and entertainingly illustrated. It is an admirable addition to the existing literature on Paracelsianism, to which the author has already contributed extensively. This reviewer has only two minor criticisms. More could have been