

Book Reviews

The focus of the volume then shifts fully to the disease environments of the New World. Thorough and persuasive articles examine the previously unexplained ailment of dry belly ache, interpreted here as the result of lead poisoning; consider the effect of improved nutrition on a normally malnourished West Indian slave population; and Donald Cooper confirms that the susceptibility to cholera previously identified in American Blacks extended to Brazilian Blacks. Richard Steckel contributes an enterprising interdisciplinary study of slave childhood, reminding us that the common perception of good material treatment did not necessarily extend to the most vulnerable in slave societies. Finally, Thomas Wilson turns to a current medical problem, hypertension, and presents a convincing historical hypothesis for its continued high prevalence amongst Blacks.

In a concluding chapter on future avenues of research, Kiple argues that with the boundaries between the physical and social sciences now broken down, black biological history has an exciting future. This volume is evidence of both the vitality and the quality of the work presently being undertaken, and of the enormous opportunities an interdisciplinary approach offers historians in this field.

Adrian P. Mercer
London

ALFRED JAY BOLLET, *Plagues & poxes: the rise and fall of epidemic disease*, New York, Demos Publications, 1987, 8vo, pp. xii, 196, \$29.95.

One of the things that evidently irritate professional historians is the delight laymen take in parlour games—the effects on history if Cleopatra's nose had been a different shape, say, or if a later Greek king had not died from a monkey bite. But such pastimes are harmless and players will rejoice that Dr Alfred Jay Bollet's book gives them a new hand. His collection of essays, originally published in *Resident and Staff Physician* and *Medical Times*, deals elegantly and excitingly with a wide range of topics. In fact, his title *Plagues and poxes* does less than justice to the much wider scope of the book; to be sure, Bollet discusses syphilis and smallpox, malaria and yellow fever, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and the Spanish influenza, but he also spends much of the book on such other topics as the discovery of the vitamin deficiencies, advances in surgical care, and the rise of myocardial infarction. There are also excellent accounts of the illnesses of various presidents of the USA, including the secret operation on Cleveland, done on a yacht to remove a cancer of the hard palate.

As is often the case these days, however, Dr Bollet has not been well served by his publishers: some illustrations would have been an attractive feature, there is no index, and irritating errors such as Lemelian for Lumleian, Keil for Kiel, and Ronald Hart for Hare should have been put right. A more cogent criticism of the book is that the strait-jacket of the essay does not always make for a rounded discussion of a difficult subject: you would never guess, for instance, at the serious difficulties encountered by Sir Morell Mackenzie in treating the German Crown Prince or by Howard Florey in developing penicillin. And Bollet has a tendency to swallow one side of the story. On the basis of one article (admittedly by the President's physician) he seems to refute the orthodoxy that Roosevelt was a sick man at Yalta and hence failed to stand up to Stalin. In Bollet's view, Roosevelt's appearance was due to dieting and excessive digitalis and there was little evidence of cardiovascular disease. Yet such shrewd observers as Sir Alexander Cadogan had little doubt that Roosevelt's lack of interest and torpor at the conference reflected serious illness, a view they thought confirmed when he died of a sudden stroke two months after Yalta. Nevertheless, these are not major criticisms and it is good to have such readable and adequate documentation of so many important medical advances in a single book.

Stephen Lock
British Medical Journal

F. FENNER and A. GIBBS (editors), *Portraits of viruses: a history of virology*, Basle, Karger, 1988, 8vo, pp. viii, 344, illus., S.Fr. 147.00/DM 176.00/\$98.00/£66.90.

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Portraits of viruses is an apt title for this volume, a collection of essays on the development of studies of individual viruses by some of the best-known workers in the field, active research scientists rather than historians. As such, each essay gives unique insight into the relationship between author and subject, and offers each author's assessment of the importance of the results obtained by himself and by fellow researchers. That such an assessment is necessarily an individual one is emphasized by a remark made by the editors in their preface. They explain their thwarted desire to include lists of "landmark papers" for each virus, and regret that they "found that the criteria used by different contributors to decide what were really landmark papers differed too much to make the effort worthwhile". Quite.

Already published individually in *Intervirology* over a 10-year period, the essays in the present collection (the editors hope to continue the series to add another volume in the coming decade) offers a compelling if incomplete view of the development of a discipline which has grown with the century, in tandem with molecular biology, to unparalleled variety and complexity.

Written by virologists and molecular biologists working in increasingly specialized fields, this is an important reference text for the specialist, rather than a book for historical browsing. It is not a comprehensive history, nor does it pretend to be (except perhaps for the questionable subtitle). Some viruses of central importance are absent for no better reason than that the editors were unable to find suitable authors for their portraits; but the 15 papers here presented are eminently readable and enjoyable specimens of a genre in which each could have been subtitled "One man's view of virology". As such, they are of historical interest not just as portraits of viruses, but as portraits of each author and his individual view of the development of virology. Dr Fenner's own essay on the poxviruses is perhaps the most complete and satisfying in terms of history, although the format has necessitated the exclusion of additional highly interesting material which he has published elsewhere.

To this reviewer at least, it seems an oversight that the opportunity has been missed, in a volume subtitled *A history of virology*, to record here the loss of the distinguished contributors who have died before publication of the collected papers. Only Professor Wildy dedicated his essay on herpesvirus, first published in 1986, to "the late Sir Macfarlane Burnet"; his own death the following year goes unrecorded, as does that of Basil Kassanis, in spite of the fact that all articles still carry their original recommendation to address all inquiries to their authors.

A book to be recommended to the specialist—the well-off specialist—or specialist library with money to spend.

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RONALD D. MANN (editor), *The history of the management of pain from early principles to present practice*. The proceedings of a conference organised by the Section of the History of Medicine of the Royal Society of Medicine, London. Carnforth, Lancs., and Park Ridge, NJ, Parthenon, 1988, 8vo, pp. 204, illus., £39.00.

The mismatch of title and contents make this the most bizarre book I have ever read. The subject of the title is certainly worthy; I know and greatly respect a number of the authors, who are well qualified to write most powerfully on the subject. What we have in fact appears largely to be a group of after-dinner speeches for dinners I am glad I did not attend. The authors of chapter four are at least honest about the fact that their chapter was evidently intended for some other book or journal: they write, "The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the agents currently used in anaesthetic practice." That is indeed a worthy purpose but hardly relevant to the title of this book. Perhaps the most out-of-place chapter, occupying a quarter of the book, is written by the editor. Although entitled 'The history of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents' it deals in considerable and interesting detail with the side-effects of contemporary drugs in this class. It is true that the Reverend Stone's 1763 report to the Royal Society on his discovery of willow bark as good for "aguish and intermitting disorders" is slapped on the end of this chapter, in an effort to get the book back on the rails.

The flavour of the book can be quickly tasted in the last three chapters written by three