

## Book Reviews

decisive break away from the hospitals' traditional orientation. The reactionary old clique of administrators was overturned, and new faces entered hospital administration, bringing with them a more liberal approach and a more receptive attitude to medical innovation. The able-bodied, incurables, and malingerers were more carefully weeded out, in an effort to make hospital populations truly "case médicaux" rather than merely "cas sociaux". And real improvements were made in medical services (closer medical supervision, reform of the intern system, the modernization of hospital pharmacies, the use of scientific instruments, a greater openness to clinical instruction, etc.) and, consequently, in general standards of internal hygiene and conditions (water supplies, floor cleaning, heating, etc.).

The actual hospitals whose history Faure here recreates remain somewhat shadowy – the English reader at least will regret not having the different types of institution (Hôtel-Dieu, Charité, Antiquaille, . . .) more clearly delineated. Conversely, however, the character of life within the institutions comes across particularly strikingly. Close analysis of the whole range of archival riches available to the historian of hospitals reveals the institutions not at all as the Foucaultesque spaces for the refinement of techniques of social discipline and dressage imagined by some historians. Rather, they emerge as sprawling, dirty, complex, overcrowded, unkempt, noisy, and altogether more human institutions. Even if by mid-century the idea of a *machine à guérir* had triumphed in Lyons "dans les esprits", the day still seemed far off when it would be achieved "dans les faits". The medicalization of the provincial French hospital evidently still had far to go.

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G. N. CANTOR and M. J. S. HODGE (editors), *Conceptions of ether. Studies in the history of ether theories 1840–1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. x, 351, £30.00.

This book might appropriately have been entitled 'Conceptions of the historiography of the ether' embracing, as it does, a wide range of viewpoints on the "proper" concerns of the historian of ether theories. J. L. Heilbron, writing on 'The electrical field before Faraday', eschews "alchemical" history which assumes that "the innovative scientist acquires his basic and guiding conceptions from general philosophy and metaphysics" and confines himself to "the first task of the intellectual historian, reconstructing the public state of knowledge". This approach is generally adhered to (despite occasional "lapses") by J. Z. Buchwald ('The quantitative ether in the first half of the nineteenth century'), D. M. Siegel ('Thomson, Maxwell and the universal ether in Victorian physics'), and Howard Stein ('"Subtler forms of matter" in the period following Maxwell'), who present detailed accounts of mathematical and physical models of ether developed in the nineteenth century and the scientific problems that gave rise to them. Other contributors have, however, engaged unashamedly in "alchemical" history. M. Norton Wise, writing on 'German concepts of force, energy, and the electromagnetic ether: 1845–1880', investigates the influence of German Idealist philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* on nineteenth-century German conceptions of the ether. G. N. Cantor devotes his contribution to 'The theological significance of ethers', and reasonably suggests "a dynamic interaction between scientific theorising and theology". J. R. R. Christie argues that the ether in the eighteenth century was a cultural phenomenon that is best interpreted by examining the various uses (social, political, theological, scientific, . . .) to which the ether was put. And Roger K. French is inevitably drawn into considering the metaphysical problems surrounding the role of subtle fluids in physiology.

There are significant substantive as well as methodological differences. Larry Laudan's ('The medium and its message: a study of some philosophical controversies about ether') strange assertion that ethers were rejected in Scotland is at odds with Christie's essay (largely concerned with the ether theories of Scottish chemists) and P. M. Heimann's discussion ('Ether and imponderables') of the ether theories of, amongst others, Cullen, Black, and Hutton.

Wisely, the editors did not fall into the trap of trying to impose a superficial unity on such diversity. Instead, their lucid introduction provides an overview of 'Major themes in the development of ether theories from the ancients to 1900', which draws on, rather than attempts

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to synthesize, the works of their contributors. They also attempt a useful, if somewhat narrowly conceived, taxonomy of ethers and discuss some of the interesting questions raised by and about the recent historiography of the subject.

On the whole, historians of science should welcome this book, which shows how far and in how many directions the discipline has travelled since E. T. Whittaker's work on the same subject. They will not, however, welcome the price.

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*Laennec 1781–1826*, Colloque organisé au Collège de France 1981, *Revue du Palais de la Découverte*, Special No. 22, August 1981, 8vo, pp. 343, illus., Fr. 45.00 (paperback).

This special number of the *Revue du Palais de la Découverte* presents the proceedings of an international colloquium organized by the Collège de France in 1981 to commemorate the bicentennial of the birth of R.-T.-H. Laennec. The thirty-five contributions brought together in this volume are mainly grouped in four categories that cover Laennec as a professor of the Collège de France, Laennec as a medical figure, Laennec as a Parisian humanist, and the influence of Laennec's work outside France. The papers, mostly by French authors and all in the French language, are generally rather brief and – as is to be expected in collections of this sort – the quality of scholarship varies considerably from one paper to the next.

A few of the contributions included are essentially pieces of ritual oratory (such as the sermon preached at a memorial mass after the close of the colloquium) and others have a somewhat peculiar focus (such as the characterological analysis of Laennec's handwriting). But in amongst these curiosities there are a number of sound historical studies by scholars of recognized stature in the field of medical history, including M.-J. Imbault-Huart, M. D. Grmek, Pierre Huard, Jean Théodoridès, Othmar Keel, and E. H. Ackerknecht. The papers by these scholars, and several of those by scientific and medical contributors, make this collection more than just a souvenir of Laennec's 200th birthday and give it real value for the professional historian of medicine.

The introduction to this volume notes that the commemoration of the Laennec bicentennial, of which the Collège de France colloquium formed only one component, was initiated and personally sponsored by President Giscard d'Estaing. If a government of the Right could go to such lengths to honour the royalist and militant Catholic Laennec in 1981, perhaps President Mitterrand's government of the Left should now take the opportunity to honour the republican and militant sceptic François Magendie, whose 200th birthday falls in 1983.

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V. C. MEDVEI, *A history of endocrinology*, London, Boston, and The Hague, MTP Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xviii, 913, illus., £49.95.

This volume on the history of endocrinology is packed with historical details about the development of this important special field of medicine. While it contains many fascinating accounts of momentous events, it also has severe flaws. The historical facts are often presented in detail without any sense of connexion and, as a result, the sequential development of knowledge in a particular field is at times difficult to follow. The presentation of the material, if better organized, would be more useful to the reader. The section on present trends is weak. For example, there is scant treatment of the exciting and important area of ectopic hormones, which has been a rapidly developing field in the past quarter-century. There is little discussion of the biosynthesis of protein and peptide hormones, and the information on the mechanism of hormones, a field of great current interest, is brief. The author might have done better to choose an earlier cut-off date for this history.

In general, the book is entertaining and informative. It will be useful for the endocrinologist to have it on his shelf.

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