

Book Reviews

recognition is made also of Bright's discoveries in liver disease and neurology. But the reader gains little understanding of Bright's work in the context of changing ideas of disease, chemistry, and medical investigation of the first half of the nineteenth century. We do not learn enough about what, if any, skills and ideas Bright brought back from his European excursions. It is when discussing Bright the physician and scientist that the author avoids depth but yields to hyperbole: "No one since Harvey had effected so great a revolution in medical thinking", etc. (Perhaps the source material shaped the book's emphasis.) The reader encounters several failings of accuracy: Laennec is referred to as "the French chemist", and George Owen Rees is mistakenly said to have devoted "most of his working life to minute studies of renal tissue". Certain persons appear in the text or index missing their first name, e.g., "Dr Bostock", as if it were considered of no importance to look them up. Perhaps of greater annoyance to scholars, however, will be the casual approach to documentation. The collections of letters and papers used, some privately held, are briefly described in the back of the volume, but the author chose to avoid the appearance of scholarly baggage and kept her notes to a severe minimum. And even those that refer to letters usually omit dates or location of the items. This vagueness will prove frustrating to other historians interested in Bright and those who worked with him during the lively decades of British medicine not satisfyingly described by this affectionate and personal biography.

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ROBERT L. RICHARDS, *Dr John Rae*, Whitby, Caedmon of Whitby Press, 1984, 8vo, pp. xii, 231, illus., £16.50.

Beyond the comprehension of persons who live in temperate climates, the unrelenting Arctic wilderness has frequently bound men to itself like an addictive drug, driving them to remarkable feats of fortitude and endurance. The bleakness and loneliness have driven people to near-madness, yet when they have abandoned it, they have felt themselves to be rootless and soulless. One such addict was John Rae (1813–93), an Orkney native who trained in medicine at Edinburgh and who sailed to Hudson's Bay in 1833 as a ship's surgeon. Finding the northern isolation to be congenial, he remained as a surgeon and a trader at Moose Factory, a remote Hudson's Bay Company fort. In 1846, he became an explorer, spending the next eight years in the Arctic. By his own account, in an autobiography preserved at the Scott Polar Institute in Cambridge, he travelled some 13,000 miles on foot and in small boats and surveyed nearly 1,800 miles of previously unexplored coastline on the mainland of Canada and on Victoria Island. He was successful because of his immense fortitude but also because, as an explorer, he went native. He spent at least one winter in a snow-house with only enough fuel for cooking. Indeed, Rae was one of the first Europeans to get to know the Eskimos well, expressing great sympathy for them before it became a fashionable thing to do.

Rae is best known as the man who, in 1854, first passed on some information he had received from natives concerning the fate of Sir John Franklin's party of explorers, who had vanished in 1845 after setting out from England with two ships to search for the north-west passage. Rae's report, with suggestions that the party had resorted to cannibalism before dying of hunger and exposure, horrified the British public. Rae was ostracized for what was perceived to be a slur on the men of the Royal Navy. For this, and because he repeatedly criticized the navy's methods of Arctic exploration, he antagonized the establishment. Although his own methods of exploration apparently revolutionized northern travel, he was virtually unknown by the general public. Indeed, his retirement years in Britain were embittered by the lack of recognition of his achievements.

Dr Richards, a physician, undertook a biography, wishing to repair the injustice he perceived in Rae's eclipse as an explorer. His research on both sides of the Atlantic was extensive and painstaking. In spite of his long labour, however, the book is difficult to read. The narrative is tedious, its parts strung together by pointless quotations. In spite of his sympathy for Rae, Richards conveys little of the man's personality, responses, or motivations.

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Rae's numerous quarrels with the naval establishment, with members of the Royal Geographical Society, with Lady Franklin, and with the British public through the press are related without interpretation. This is a biography without personalities, and can be recommended only for its bibliography and as a reference book for students of Arctic exploration.

The book is attractively produced, a tribute to the workmanship of a small specialist press.

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KARL E. ROTHSCHUH, *Naturheilmovement, Reformmovement, Alternativebewegung*, Stuttgart, Hippokrates Verlag, 1983, 8vo, pp. 148, illus., DM.58.00.

This closely (sometimes microscopically) printed work is intended as popularization. Whatever its faults and risks, it can be placed first on the reading-lists of anyone seeking an initial framework for research into the movements and "great" names of medical and semi-medical heresies within German-speaking countries during the last 200 years or so.

The author, a veteran of medical historiography, is clearly unhappy at having to compress so much into 140 pages. His discussion begins with Rousseau, to whom he attributes most of the subsequent movements in Germany. His excursions into two millennia of European civilization prior to Rousseau force him into potted histories which are at best old-fashioned. Both before and after Jean-Jacques, the main method is to identify how various writers (all too appropriately, their names are italicized) transmitted a tradition. Any popular currents are mentioned only fleetingly, except when one of the italicized immortals is lowly-born. And dimensions both social and political are seldom tackled, except as part of the background to the real thing.

This procedure is particularly disquieting, given the author's plausible argument that present-day "alternative" movements are fundamentally similar to those he is tracing. For, by the decades around 1900, his often uncommented listing of beliefs and of men (very occasionally their wives, sisters, or models) begins to include racism and anti-semitism. This, one presumes, is hardly the author's fault but surely has something to do with the compression and conventionality of his work. In particular, to mention the Third Reich merely for having swallowed or crushed these movements (p.126) is somewhat one-sided—given, for example, that the "architect and artist" Paul Schultze-Naumburg was allied not merely with reformers of life-style (in particular, of female dress: p.121) but also with the likes of Julius Streicher.

Rothschuh is seeking to link pre- with post-1930s movements. But in his haste, he may encourage a revival of the political ambiguities in the movements he narrates.

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J. O. LEIBOWITZ and S. MARCUS (editors), *Sefer Hanisyonot. The book of medical experiences attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984, 8vo, pp. 345, illus., \$28.00.

The publication for the first time of *Sefer Hanisyonot. The book of medical experiences*, edited, translated, and commented upon by two eminent scholars, has not only rescued the work from oblivion but also the name of the great Arabic medical author 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Haitham, of whom we know little. The sub-title of the book, *Medical theory. Rational and magical therapy. A study in medievalism* is appropriate, for it brings before the reader the whole spectrum of medieval medicine and its application. This twelfth-century medical treatise attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra and based on an earlier treatise of al-Haitham, no longer existing in its original Arabic, is an example of the synthesis of Islamic with Jewish culture which gave rise to the scientific and literary fame of the medieval Jewish-Arabic world.

The work begins with an introduction and evaluation of the philosophical basis of the first