

Book Reviews

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

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women. Each has made crucial contributions. Dame Cicely Saunders, if anyone, is entitled to write about 'The evolution of hospices' because she is certainly the most important single figure in their recent evolution. Instead, she rambles on with a few not very well-chosen words which are a mockery of her powerful incisive writing on this subject elsewhere. Next, Jennifer Beinart, who has written brilliantly on obstetric pain, writes instead on the growth of treatment of intractable pain. Her after-dinner chapter appears to be based on after-dinner chats with John Lloyd. It is not explained why John Lloyd, who is in rude health and very interesting, should not write on the subject himself. Last of the three, Wendy Savage, an obstetrician of considerable importance, writes a chapter entitled 'The management of obstetric pain', instead of Dr Beinart. Needless to say, Mrs Savage writes that the idea of management by other people of a very personal experience is anathema to her. I completely agree with her, but her chapter is at the same time irrelevant and excellent.

I can hardly bear to comment on the other chapters. There is a certain humour in Helen King's, enticingly titled 'The early anodynes: pain in the ancient world'. One has a feeling that she was press-ganged into writing about pains where we do not understand what the ancients were talking about, and nostrums whose contents are unknown, given in unknown dosages, and of unknown efficacy.

There is no doubt that a serious and fascinating book could be written with this title and with these chapter headings. This is not that book. Even these authors could write such a book, but they didn't.

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MARIS A. VINOVSIS, *An "epidemic" of adolescent pregnancy? Some historical and policy considerations*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, 8vo, pp. xix, 284, £22.50.

This book will be of more interest to those concerned with the process of formulating policy in the United States than to historians. It is a collection of essays dealing with the problems of designing, implementing, and evaluating programmes for dealing with adolescent pregnancy. The detailed analysis of the groups involved in federal policy formation is leavened to an extent by a cursory attempt to put adolescent pregnancy in historical perspective. The book does not, however, address the wider issues of the experience of sexuality that the topic raises. For example, although there is a chapter on the young fathers, most of the essays discuss policies designed for "adolescents", without noticing that it is young women who are to be monitored and whose behaviour is to be policed. Vinovskis ignores this point in his discussion of the parental-notification controversy. Since the proponents of notification aimed to ensure that parents were informed when a minor was provided with a prescription birth control drug or device, it is clear that it was the privacy of girls that would be invaded, while boys could still freely purchase non-prescription condoms. Here the historical insight that Vinovskis claims is so valuable in putting current preoccupations into perspective eludes him. Had notification been implemented, it would have continued to uphold the double standard in social policy which feminists have always attacked, most notably in the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in Victorian England.

The book makes a plea for more and better input into public policy by social scientists. The problem is that policy makers are likely to be more concerned with remaining in office than in learning the lessons that history might offer.

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JOHANNES BÜTTNER and CHRISTA HABRICH, *Roots of clinical chemistry. A guide through the Historical Exhibition on the occasion of the XIII International Congress of Clinical Chemistry 1987, The Hague, The Netherlands June 28–July 3, 1987*, Darmstadt, GIT Verlag, 1987, 4to, pp. 158, illus., [no price stated].