

## Book Reviews

ROGER ROLLS, with photographs by CLIVE QUINNELL, *The hospital of the nation. The story of spa medicine and the Mineral Water Hospital of Bath*, Bath, Bird Publications, 1988, 4to, pp. x, 181, illus., £18.50.

In a relatively slim text—but one quite sumptuously illustrated, with both old prints and modern photographs—Roger Rolls has attempted to unite at least three separate and substantial books: an account of spa medicine, a survey of the rise and fall of Bath as Britain's premier spa resort, and a history of the Mineral Water Hospital in the city. It is, indeed, a tall order. The result is never less than an immensely pleasurable read, but some aspects break more scholarly ground than others.

The most meaty sections of Roll's book deal with the Mineral Water Hospital, founded in 1738 as part of the wave of foundations of charitable provincial hospitals, yet an institution with a difference. In that its rationale was the presence of the Bath waters, it was recognized that only patients with particular conditions should be admitted; thus, as a specialist hospital, it should admit patients from all over the country. (Rolls shows that the southern counties, not surprisingly, contributed some 80 per cent of the patients in the Georgian era.)

Rolls offers a lucid and original account, derived from archival sources, of the progress of the Bath hospital, giving due weight to medical and nursing staff, to building programmes, and to the finances. In doing so he picks up an intriguing problem. Case notes and annual statistics gave a profile, clear from early on, of the kinds of conditions which apparently responded best to the water treatment. Yet, despite these leads, the hospital did not become a site for continuing medical *research*, into paralysis, arthritis, rheumatism, etc. Even the Devonshire colic, so often relieved by treatment at the Hospital, was not actually investigated by the staff. Intriguing questions are raised here as to the relationship between specialist hospitals and clinical research, which it would require analysis of other institutions to resolve. Certainly it appears that in the Victorian era the Hospital conservatively accepted its role as an agency of therapy rather than as an organ of investigation.

The history of Bath, and the city's role as "hospital to the nation", are dealt with more skimpily, though Rolls offers enjoyable discussions of the leading Bath physicians of the Georgian and Regency periods. A full prosopography of Bath medical practitioners—coupled with an account of their medical politics and the economics of practice—is still needed: let us hope that Dr Rolls will pursue his researches in these fields.

Roy Porter  
Wellcome Institute

R. G. W. ANDERSON and CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE (editors), *Science, medicine and dissent: Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), Papers celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Priestley together with a catalogue of an exhibition held at the Royal Society and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine*, London, Wellcome Trust and the Science Museum, 1987, 4to, pp. xi, 105, illus., £9.95 (paperback).

If chemistry is a French science because of Lavoisier, then at least the crucial experiment that sent the erroneous phlogiston theory to its doom was carried out by a good empirical provincial Unitarian Englishman—Joseph Priestley. Since those happy days of history as the introduction to science textbooks, the world has come to seem much more complex, and Priestley perhaps especially so.

The literature has been hidden in isolated articles and there is no modern full-length biography. This book therefore stands alone as a compilation of current understanding. It deals with the Priestley who was not seen before, the political and metaphysical thinker who was also a pharmaceutical and philosophical chemist. The substantial appendix which serves as the catalogue to a temporary exhibition of Priestley personalia reminds us of his enduring iconic significance.

The first article, by Chris Lawrence, establishes the chronology and the novel world of its subject as it shows the eighteenth-century connection between research on gases, putrid air, and

## Book Reviews

disease. One first-class original contribution, by John Brooke, compares the images of Whewell and Priestley as nineteenth-century caricatures embellished by twentieth-century sociologists. McEvoy summarizes his well-documented analysis of Priestley. Many of the other papers, based on exegesis of particular sides of Priestley's complex thoughts, connect perhaps too little with the original significance of the man: his chemical experiments and indeed with the catalogue at the back of the book. However the volume does provide an impression of the intellectual anatomy of this eccentric and elusive figure. One does begin to look at the well-reproduced pictures of his apparatus with a better sense of his Faustian world. Historians looking for a fascinating project should read the book and dream.

Robert Bud  
Science Museum, London

F. J. J. VAN ASSEN and others (editors), *Een eeuw vrouwenarts*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987, 8vo, pp. 313, illus., Dfl. 39.00.

As part of its centenary celebrations, the Dutch Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (NVOG) produced a memorial book with the title *One hundred years of women's doctors* (the German "Frauenarzt"). It contains a history of the Society, based on the minutes of its meetings, as well as articles dealing with the development of the speciality in The Netherlands and its former colonies, Indonesia, Surinam, and the Dutch West Indies.

Although the book's editors include some historians of medicine, almost all the contributions were written by members of the Society, themselves doctors, which makes for a sympathetic but generally "whiggish" approach towards the past. The book was obviously written, in the first place, for Dutch obstetricians and gynaecologists. Its significance for the historian of medicine is principally as a source of anecdotes and personal reminiscences, but it is an interesting historical document in itself. Striking, for example, is the attitude to midwives to which the articles attest. Unlike most of their colleagues abroad, Dutch obstetricians have retained a positive attitude and have consistently argued that midwives' education be maintained at a high level. It is apparent that they have done so throughout the history of the NVOG. Female obstetricians and gynaecologists who have figured in the Society's past have not been forgotten and a special chapter is devoted to them. Wherever patients are mentioned, the tone is considered and respectful. This book then seems to me to be a true witness to the unique, woman-friendly character of Dutch obstetrics that persists despite growing demands for a more technical approach.

Anja Hiddinga  
University of Amsterdam

JANE TURNER CENSER (editor), *The papers of Frederick Law Olmstead*, vol. IV, *Defending the Union: the Civil War and the U.S. Sanitary Commission 1861-1863*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 8vo, pp. xxv, 757, illus. £26.50.

Frederick Law Olmstead was one of the many gifted nineteenth-century amateurs who spread their talents over several areas. Best known for his description of the *ante bellum* South and for the creation of Central Park in New York City, he also planned parks and estates for Louisville and other American cities. Olmstead was drawn to the United States Sanitary Commission by his abolitionist zeal and his association with Henry W. Bellows, a Unitarian minister largely responsible for the organization of the Commission. The Sanitary Commission grew out of the desire by voluntary women's associations to aid the war effort in the North. Its original purpose was to serve as a central agency to gather and distribute food, clothing, and medical supplies to the Union soldiers, but the physicians who dominated the executive board also envisioned it as an agency to gather statistical and medical information on the troops. Olmstead, the first secretary of the newly-founded Commission, saw it as a means for teaching self-discipline,