

Book Reviews

investment is credited with promoting further improvement until the late 1930s. Thereafter, the economy lagged, but mortality continued to decline; a circumstance that argues for the success of modern medicine in fighting disease.

The data on mortality since Castro's coming to power is also revealing. Between 1959 and 1980, average life expectancy increased eight to nine years, to the point that it is virtually on a par with that of the United States. Also the infant mortality rate declined from 46+ deaths per thousand live births (1969) to less than twenty per thousand (1979), and without significant distinction between rates in urban and rural areas. Because economic growth under Castro has been minimal, the author concludes that more equitable distribution of wealth, and equalized access to health care accounted for these gains.

This collection of mortality data and disease information is immensely valuable—even fascinating—and the demographic analysis highly informed. And, indeed, one is left wanting more. It appears a reflection of the sources that the emphasis is weighted heavily toward the pre-1959 period, thus the data from Castro years seems rather lean. Similarly, the omission of economic data tempers the strength of the author's claims about the relative importance of economic growth as a determinant of mortality decline. Finally, except for the separate focus on the municipality of Havana, the author deals with the Cuban population as a whole. This misses the opportunity to distinguish mortality and morbidity trends, especially in the pre-Castro years, as related to wealth, occupation, and levels of nutrition. That is more the realm of epidemiology, I know, but grouping mortality data according to socio-economic status is of critical importance in evaluating the scope of Cuba's health revolution.

The fact that over the past two decades equalized access to health care has fostered mortality decline raises important questions about the organization and performance of Cuban medicine before and since Castro. Most provocative is the possibility that the Mexicos and Brazils that are chasing social progress through "modernization" might well study the example of Cuba for insight into improving life expectancy and bringing down infant mortality rates. It is certainly to its credit that this book provokes such issues, and invites further inquiry.

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JOHN D. SPILLANE, *Medical travellers. Narratives from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*, Oxford University Press, 1984, 8vo, pp. xii, 236, illus., £14.95.

This is a book that must have been fascinating to write, and every page affords points of interest to the casual reader which would make it welcome on the coffee, or, more appropriately, the waiting-room table. But despite its concise title, it has no coherence beyond the anecdotal, and offers no particular insight or illumination about doctors, travel, or any of the numerous countries from colonial America to imperial China which are featured in this collection of travelogues. Dr Spillane himself confesses to his disappointment that doctors proved no more observant or perspicacious than any other class of travellers, even regarding specifically medical matters, and what has here been rescued from varying degrees of oblivion and presented to the general reader is, predictably, a kaleidoscope of random impressions of "foreign parts" seen through the eyes of educated Anglo-Saxon protestants. The editor has done a great deal of conscientious background research and made a creditable attempt to make these assorted diaries readable. But editing has tended to underline the inconsequential jerkiness of the narratives, compressing unrelated facts into even greater proximity. Dr Spillane's own contributions can be intrusively didactic and even irrelevant, telling whom the travellers failed to visit or what happened twenty miles away or twenty years later, and occasionally material for a footnote appears in the text. The attentive reader can trace the process by which these diaries spurred the author to wider historical reading, and although the specific material which would provide evidence for historians of tunny-fishing, transportation, or even medicine, will not be sought in such an anthology, it may kindle a similar interest in the general reader, whether medical or lay.

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