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who used this, his only book not only to condemn suicide but also to emphasize how the godly life could help one to avoid it. Sym dealt with “difficult” conundrums such as, does the man condemned to death unjustly co-operate willingly with the executioner? (The answer was, yes, again illustrating the Puritans’ deep conservatism.) Sym also discussed at length such psychological states as melancholy, which he noted were, like suicide, very widespread and also the temptations of and possession by the devil, that lead to suicide.

Sym’s book will appeal to psychologists and historians of psychology (which is the aim of reprinting it in this series), but it will also interest general historians for its explication of a way of thinking that disappeared in the light of Enlightenment reason. Additionally, the work is greatly enhanced by Michael MacDonald’s excellent introduction, which sets the context both for the history of suicide in general, and Sym’s work in particular.

Andrew Wear, Wellcome Institute

MICHAEL HUNTER, *Establishing the new science: the experience of the early Royal Society*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, The Boydell Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xiv, 382, illus., £45.00, \$86.00.

This collection of nine essays (four of which have not previously been published) surveys the institutional career of the Royal Society from its founding to the early eighteenth century. It is good to have this material in book form. Only now can one properly appreciate Dr Hunter’s immense industry in burrowing through the papers of the Society and its leading figures. New essays include a confident guide through the legal and proprietary maze of Sir John Cutler’s endowment, a cautious analysis of the allegedly official status of Thomas Sprat’s *History*, and a meticulous survey of the functions of committees in the early Royal Society. The highlights of already printed materials are studies of the Society’s abortive plans for purpose-built quarters (written with P. B. Wood) and patterns of patronage in the support of Nehemiah Grew’s botanical work.

No one knows more about the institutional history of Restoration science than Dr Hunter. From tracing the vagaries of testamentary law in connection with the Cutler affair to sorting out the exact number and provenance of stuffed humming-birds in the Society’s Repository, Hunter is a master of his material. Indeed, detail and particularities are the key to Hunter’s view of the Royal Society. The Society, he warns, “has already suffered greatly from over-schematized views of its origins and nature. It is essential that in studying institutions we do justice to their full historical complexity” (p. 353; cf. p. 41). Where other historians have allegedly erred in seeing coherence, solidarity of purpose, and effectiveness of action, Hunter displays the Royal Society as divided, hesitant and fumbling about what should be done, and inept in executing its plans. Its early history was, in Hunter’s opinion, largely a history of “false trails” and failures: the Royal Society was “naive” in its attitude to linguistic reform, “naive” in its ambitions for a museum, “naive” in believing that the new science might be an anodyne to social disorder (pp. 36, 48, 56, 139, 151).

Where there is historical splitting to be done, Hunter goes at it with a will. Historians “will misunderstand the early Royal Society if [they] presume undue unanimity among its members” (p. 28). No text can be securely identified as expressing an official corporate view—not even Sprat’s *History*, which, Hunter argues, was only loosely supervised by the Society. Nor can any shared sense of the particular religious and social uses of science be reliably attributed to the Society. Here too there was such a variety of views that no generalization can safely be made. Rather than taking any specific position on science and its political consequences, the Royal Society sought to “align the new science with as many consensus values as possible”. There was “no undue degree of consensus” among its members on such issues. The political colour of the Society was that of a “chameleon”. Far from using the new science to address the problem of social disorder, to push party politics or particular theologies, the Royal Society hoped to enjoy a quiet life and to “offend no one” (pp. 57, 60, 65).

The overall effect of all this splitting is at once salutary and depressing. No legitimate historical or sociological purpose can be served by a failure to engage with the “fullness of

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detail" that Hunter has unearthed. A respect for detail is not the monopoly of historians, nor indeed of historians of a certain methodological tendency. Yet an ambition to arrive at an account which captures "full historical complexity" is—dare one say it—"naive".

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GEORGE P. MILNE (ed.), *Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society: a bicentennial history 1789–1989*, Aberdeen University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xv, 313, illus., £17.00 + £1.50 p&p from Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society, Medical Centre, Foresterhill, Aberdeen AB9 2ZB.

Readers who assume from the title that this is a structured history of Scotland's oldest Medico-Chirurgical Society will be sadly disappointed by this compilation of essays, which, although intended to update and complement J. S. Riddell's 1922 history of the Society, makes no attempt to provide either a chronological or thematic account of developments during the two centuries of the Medico-Chirurgical's existence.

One of the principal features of the volume is its concentration upon some of the leading figures connected with Aberdeen medicine during the past 200 years. More than a third of the chapters are devoted to biographical essays on such luminaries as Naughton Dunn (commemorated in the Naughton Dunn Memorial Trust, which is administered by the Society although he was never a member), Matthew Hay, Andrew Moir, Sir Ashley Mackintosh, Sir Alexander Ogston and David Rorie of Cults, author of 'The Lum Hat Wantin' the Croon' and revered as the Poet Laureate of the Society. Not surprisingly, several authors make extended reference to Sir James McGrigor, credited with being the key figure in the foundation of the Aberdeen Medical Society in December 1789 by a group of medical students and subsequently the first Director General of the Army Medical Department.

While some contributors do treat of events which have a significance beyond the merely parochial—such as Iain Levack's investigation of early anaesthesia in Aberdeen, or J. M. Stowers's account of Aberdeen's place in the history of diabetic research and progress (which confessedly leans heavily on Michael Bliss's *The discovery of insulin*)—a number of the others are decidedly esoteric in their appeal. In this regard one need look no further than the description, originally published in 1933, of the Eskimo kayak that has been in the possession of the Society for more than a century, or the story of the snuff mill appropriated from the Garioch and Northern Medical Association.

The quality of the individual chapters varies considerably and, despite the scholarship and antiquarian charm of some of the essays, one is left with the feeling that an opportunity has been lost to place on record a more considered assessment of the place of the medical society in modern medicine.

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A. D. MORRIS, *James Parkinson: his life and times*, ed. F. Clifford Rose, History of Neuroscience, Boston, Birkhäuser, 1989, 8vo, pp. xi, 207, illus., \$59.00.

The late A. D. Morris spent most of his career practising in Shoreditch, so it is perhaps not surprising that he devoted his retirement years to investigating the life of Hoxton's most eminent medical man, James Parkinson (1755–1824). As one would expect, Morris's biography, skilfully edited by F. Clifford Rose, devotes considerable attention to Parkinson's work on *paralysis agitans* (Charcot came up with the eponym, "Parkinson's disease"). Parkinson is justly credited as being amongst the earliest to view its varied symptoms as an authentic clinical syndrome; and the quality of his observations of the disorder may be judged from the text of the *Essay on the shaking palsy* (1817), here reproduced. Parkinson's other contributions to medical and scientific investigation also receive due note. His *Chemical pocket-book* (1800) was widely used as a compendium of practical chemistry, his *Organic remains of a former world* (3 vols., 1804–11) was, in its day, the most comprehensive