

Book Reviews

institute. Proposed to Congress in the same year as the Parker Bill, the Ransdell Bill sought to transform the Hygienic Laboratory into what the senator called a National Institute of Health with a greatly augmented budget. Ransdell had read the chemists' depiction of *American medicine in the age of chemistry*, and he quoted extensively from the report in promoting a bill patterned largely after their blueprint.

The creation of the NIH through the congressional passage of both bills, in 1930, was wrought out of prolonged conflict among such powerful interest groups as the American Medical Association, the American Chemical Society, pharmaceutical companies, and the existing federal biomedical bureaucracy. This legislative finale reflected the transformation that had taken place in public perceptions of the federal government's proper role in basic scientific research. Inaugurated at the start of the Great Depression, the NIH had its activity dampened by economic constraints during its early years. But what was critical about its course during the remainder of the interwar period, Harden argues, was not concrete expansion or research results so much as critical formation of policy that was to be the platform for the research "take-off" after World War II. A brief epilogue reviews the work of the NIH over the past half century.

Harden provides a crisp and accessible narrative of an important but complex story. Her research among the manuscripts of leading players and in government documents is impressive, as is her restraint in not overwhelming the reader with explications of political manoeuvring in all its minutiae. This is above all a study of federal policy on biomedical research, but Harden takes pains to point to the broader political and medical context. Yet this sensitivity to the larger picture makes the sometimes parochially American focus of the book all the more surprising. Biomedical scientists in the United States were self-consciously aware of European medical models, conceptual and institutional. Yet the models of centralized control over biomedical research that the NIH's architects might have had in mind as guides or foils—Britain's Medical Research Council, for example—here remain unnoticed. Nor is it sufficiently clear how much they looked to such examples as the Lister Institute, Pasteur Institute, or Ehrlich's Institute for Experimental Therapy. This is unfortunate, for a more outward-looking treatment might have added important perspective to the creative processes involved in *inventing* the NIH, and helped to draw a broader significance from an American story. As it stands, though, this is a fine study of the origins of what has become, as Harden puts it, "the foremost biomedical research facility not only in the United States but in the world" (p. 180), and deserves serious attention even from medical historians who have no particular interest in America.

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JOHN M. T. FORD, editor, *A medical student at St Thomas's Hospital, 1801–1802. The Weekes family letters*, *Medical History* Supplement 7, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1987, 8vo, pp. vii, 264, illus., £14, £18 overseas, post free from Professional and Scientific Publications, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR.

Anyone who enjoys Jane Austen's novels for their glimpses into the rhythms, preoccupations, amusements, and trials of family life in early nineteenth-century England will delight in the Weekes family correspondence. Here is humour, pain, and gentle teasing; paternal advice and fraternal competition; sisters' demands for news of London fashions and extended concern for carpet purchases. What makes the collection a welcome contribution to the history of medicine is the information it provides about a medical family whose eldest son, Hampton, spent eighteen months as an apothecary's pupil at St Thomas's Hospital in London. The Weekes, at home in the small town of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, particularly father Richard, a fairly successful general practitioner and Richard jun. (Dick), also training for a medical career, exchanged 116 letters with Hampton. Five letters between Hampton and Owen Evans, a practitioner friend in Sussex, are also included.

As John Ford carefully remarks, the Weekes' routine medical practice casts a tantalizing shadow over the correspondence. Richard sen., Dick and Hampton's sisters, Mary Ann, Grace and Fanny, only hint at the cases that Richard and Dick saw daily. The tedium of attending

labours and making up bills, the wait for deaths, weave in and out of the letters to Hampton in chance remarks. More unusual conditions, such as a gunshot wound, or how best to obtain good cow-pox matter, or the news that Richard sen. was successfully competing with other local practitioners, merited fuller discussion. The letters from home display hard-working medical men whose practice embraced a range of patients from the poor supported by the parish to respectable neighbourhood families. Along with a modest income from farm land, the profession provided the Weekes with a comfortable life and funds to send Hampton, and later Dick, to complete their medical training in London.

Hampton's letters detail his ups and downs as a boarding pupil with George Whitfield, St Thomas's resident apothecary. These are a treasure trove for anyone interested in medical education at a large London hospital in the early nineteenth century, although a dangerous foundation for sweeping generalizations. Hampton had already learned quite a bit from his father. In London he concentrated, occasionally to excess, on anatomy: his passion for dissecting, making preparations, and memorizing the minutiae of nerves, blood vessels, and muscles fills his letters to the exclusion of much about lectures or clinical practice at the hospital. The accounts of the dissecting room, with references to pupils constantly buying parts of corpses to study, vividly reveal how much discreet trading went on within St Thomas's walls. Hampton was moderately ambitious and sought (without success) the attention of such prominent medical men as Henry Cline, surgeon at St Thomas's, with hopes that he might be "advanced" in the profession. Hampton, a grind with a complacent disdain for many of the other pupils, was a rather pompous young man who was, nevertheless, seriously trying to extend his knowledge at a time when such extra work was not a legal requirement for medical or surgical practice.

Having read the Weekes' letters in manuscript, I can only praise John Ford's meticulous transcription of what are sometimes confusing scrawls. To reproduce the full text of each letter, with the original spelling and wildly erratic punctuation, was a wise decision. Not only has direct rendition reduced any unfortunate editorial interpretations of what the correspondents meant to a minimum, it retains the full flavour of the family's style and exuberance. At times, however, Dr Ford was too sparing with the editor's hand. Frequently, several of the Weekes wrote a single letter to Hampton, and the transitions from one person to another, usually clear in the manuscripts, are not always identified within the published texts, although the multiple authors are noted. Similarly, while Dr Ford painstakingly attempted to identify all of the people, places, shops and books mentioned, there are a few lacunae that reveal an understandable medical bias. For example, he has tracked down all the references to medical texts and given full citations in his notes, but overlooked the comment about Blair's *Sermons*. As the Weekes were not a particularly religious family, more information about this choice of reading could have been informative.

In his Introduction, Dr Ford provides vital background about the Weekes family, Hurstpierpoint and the organization of St Thomas's Hospital. Having visited the Weekes' homes, delved into record offices for details about the family's property, and read contemporary accounts of hospital education, Dr Ford conveys his own fascination with the Weekes' correspondence with simplicity and care. Readers should be warned, however, that this introduction is no substitute for the letters themselves. They convey nuances that no summary can capture and are, with no claim to literary merit, vastly entertaining.

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RAQUEL ALVAREZ PELÁEZ and RAFAEL HUERTAS GARCÍA-ALEJO, *¿Criminales o locos? Dos peritajes psiquiátricos del Dr Gonzalo R. Lafora*, Cuadernos Galileo del Historia de la Ciencia, No. 6, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Históricos, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1987, 12mo, pp. 331, [no price stated].

On 9 June 1933, Aurora Rodríguez, an anarchist militant of the Spanish branch of the League for Sexual Reform, shot and killed her daughter, whom she had conceived eugenically and raised to carry out her ideals. Hildegart, the rebellious daughter, was a feminist youth leader