

Book Reviews

DOROTHY A. STANSFIELD, *Thomas Beddoes MD, 1760–1808*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1984, 8vo, pp. xx, 306, Dfl.140.00/\$54.00.

Thomas Beddoes has been the subject of intermittent study, manifested through a succession of more or less specialized papers, mostly on his pneumatic studies. His political involvements have also been noticed, but usually in ways that do not reveal any substantial connexion between his science and medicine on the one hand, and his social and political activities on the other. Mrs Stansfield has succeeded admirably in demonstrating the unity of Beddoes' assorted enterprises, presenting him whole, through an interwoven thematic treatment that is broadly chronological.

Beddoes has long seemed a marginal figure, on the edge of the Lunar Society, in Edinburgh as Black's student, in Oxford as almost the first Regius Professor of Chemistry, in Bristol as Davy's employer and Coleridge's friend, and in the reform movements of the 1790s as a liberal and a democrat who was far from being a revolutionary. He has also appeared as a figure of fun, given to extravagant enthusiasms and devoted to pneumatic medicine that was ridiculed and caricatured in its own day. His biography by Stock was one-dimensional, and eschewed all controversy—a circumstance precluding consideration of much of Beddoes' life; and subsequent historians have found no central archive to fill in gaps. Mrs Stansfield, by using a greater variety of manuscript evidence, has produced a picture that in human terms is more credible, more humane, and more impressive than we previously possessed.

Beddoes studied at Oxford, worked in London under John Sheldon, a former pupil of John Hunter, travelled and met Lavoisier and other French chemists, returned to Oxford where he read lectures in chemistry and geology, left Oxford in political disfavour, moved to Clifton and set up his Pneumatic Institution, changed that institution for one more concerned with the general health of the poor, and devoted himself increasingly to preventive medicine; all the while, he was campaigning for political freedoms, popular education, and social reform.

He was unusually alert to developments in foreign science, notably in French chemistry and German medicine; he was much involved with Midlands industrialists and ironmasters; and he saw the potential social utility of science, whether in relieving food shortages or improving public health. His conviction that pneumatic chemistry would be important for medicine, and that health depended upon science, education, and social policies, gave a unity to his endeavours that still fell some way short of being a system—although the author would like to claim that Beddoes was at least “working at a system of coherent thought” (p. 96).

The book covers a lot of ground, and is lacking in any technical analysis of the scientific and medical debates in which Beddoes became embroiled; but these debates are at least indicated, so that the reader knows where to go for supplementary materials. The chapter on preventive medicine is of especial interest, describing Beddoes' systematic and long-term approach, his methods of collecting data, his advocacy of dispensaries rather than hospitals, his hopes for the use of data from military surgeons and others working with the armed forces, and much besides.

Beddoes' pneumatic programme failed of itself; he died before he could adequately implement his ideas on preventive medicine; but, as Mrs Stansfield argues, in science, medicine, and society, he served most effectively as a catalyst. She has told his story well.

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BENJAMIN V. WHITE, *Stanley Cobb. A builder of the neurosciences*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1984, 8vo, pp. xviii, 445, illus., \$29.50.

In some quarters, Stanley Cobb (1887–1968) is still remembered as the man who introduced Carl Jung to a medical audience as Dr Sigmund Freud. More generally he is the psychiatrist-in-chief at the Massachusetts General Hospital from 1934 to 1954, when he assumed the mantle of Adolf Meyer in fostering the development of American psychiatry. Like Meyer, he was a well-trained neurologist, with experience in neuropathology and the