

Book Notices

JOSÉ M^a LÓPEZ PIÑERO and FRANCISCO CALERO, *Los temas polémicos de la medicina renacentista: las 'Controversias'* (1556), de Francisco Valles, Estudios sobre la Ciencia, 1, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988, 8vo, pp. x, 458, [no price stated].

The *Controversiae* of Francisco Valles (1524–1592) were typical of mainstream academic medicine in the second half of the sixteenth century. Working from a largely Galenic base, Valles, professor of medicine at Alcalà, offered solutions to a wide variety of problems, updating, or defending, traditional theories in the light of the discoveries of such moderns as Fernel, Argenterio, Fracastoro, and Vesalius. His book went through four editions and ten printings, and continued to be influential well into the seventeenth century. Calero's Spanish translation covers only about a third of the chapters in the first edition, 1556, but is enough to give the flavour of the whole book. It is preceded by Lopez Piñero's exemplary survey of the author's life and medical theories, setting out the major themes in the work, and analysing its structure. His list of editions, however, is somewhat flawed: contrary to what is here stated, the Wellcome Library contains copies of all but nos. 2, 6, and 7 (respectively, shelf nos. 6460; 308873/7042; 6461; 6462; MSL; 6463; 6464).

DEREK A. DOW (ed.), *The influence of Scottish medicine. An historical assessment of its international impact*, The Proceedings of the 11th British Congress on the History of Medicine, organised by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, and held at Edinburgh, 22–24 August 1986, Carnforth, Lancs., and Park Ridge, NJ, The Parthenon Publishing Group, 1988, 8vo, pp. xiv, 209, illus., £14.95.

The editor's introductory assertion that this book is "an important addition to our understanding of Scottish outreach over the centuries" can be swallowed only with considerable generosity. It is a mixed triumphalist volume, some of the papers being compiled from the most familiar of secondary sources. Not one of the essays is a comprehensive study of the Scots in any particular geographical or social domain: America, London, male-midwifery, English public health, the military, to choose some of the typical chapters. Indeed, most of the papers make their point by lining up all our old friends, Smellie, Lind, the Hunters, Livingstone, etc. There is far too much reading here for too little reward.

KATHERINE A. WEBB, "One of the most useful charities in the City": *York Dispensary 1788–1988*, Borthwick Paper No. 74, University of York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research [St Anthony's Hall, York YO1 2PW], 1988, 8vo, pp. 40, £1.80 + .25 p&p, (paperback).

The "Gentleman of the Faculty resident in York would not willingly be thought to possess less Humanity than those in other places" and in 1788 these medical men averted such wild accusations by founding the York Dispensary. It was intended to serve precisely those excluded from the York County Hospital (1740): the infectious cases, the pregnant, and (although the author does not labour the point) the physicians and surgeons who had not secured positions at the older institution. For over 150 years the Dispensary weathered the usual problems: lack of space; matching subscribers' tickets for attendance to the most deserving poor; attracting reliable staff at low wages; and, in an increasingly crowded charitable world, conveying the Dispensary's unique virtues to potential subscribers. Webb's short history makes professional use of both secondary sources and archival material; her style is vigorous and concise. In short, it should serve as a model for the genre and deserves an international readership.

CHRISTOPHER MAGGS, *A century of change: the story of the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses*, London, Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses [15 Buckingham St., London WC2N 6ED], 1988, 8vo, pp. 174, illus., [no price stated], (paperback).

Book Notices

This book was commissioned by the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses to celebrate its centenary. Founded by the indomitable Henry Burdett, the Fund campaigned, against all odds, to provide a pension scheme for nurses "who did not earn enough to protect themselves". Changing to meet new social and economic situations, the Fund still prospers and today provides a variety of services for health care workers. Dr Maggs has researched the archives of the Fund and its associated literature and has given us an insight into the complexities of the insurance world, a study which highlights the high rate of sickness among those early nurses, and at the same time their sturdy response to the precepts of Samuel Smiles and calls for thrift and self-help.

RENÉ DUBOS, *Mirage of health: utopias, progress and biological change* (1959), repr. ed., New Brunswick, NJ, and London, Rutgers University Press, 1987, 8vo, pp. vii, 282, \$25.00, \$10.00 (paperback).

Dubos's book, first published thirty years ago, is an important and still-controversial document from the first decade capable of extending ecological and liberal thinking to microbes. Among the mirages of health he described, that of a disease-free Golden Age may still be with us, in the form of a belief in "progress". In the face of American complacency at the end of the 1950s, Dubos bitterly postulated that one symptom of mental illness may be the delusion that one enjoys the highest standard of living in the world. Another, related, illusion is the doctrine of specificity, more precisely, that micro-organisms "cause" disease. Public health was improving in Western Europe and North America before the germ theory of disease emerged "during the gory phase of Darwinism". More or less by an accident of history, the laboratory scientist, the hero of the eleventh hour, took centre stage and the presuppositions that enable useful *experimental* work came to dominate popular thinking about the way we get ill, or not. But we all harbour a picturesque variety of potentially lethal micro-organisms. Our bodies are not "healthy", but because the most successful parasite allows its victims as much life as is compatible with its own needs, we usually enjoy health.

They utterly exhaust each other.

They are the powers of this world.

We are their bacteria,

Dying their lives and living their deaths.

Ted Hughes's 'Ghost Crabs' could not have emerged from the sea before the first publication of this book.

KENNETH J. CARPENTER, *The history of scurvy and vitamin C*, paperback ed., Cambridge University Press, 1988, 8vo, pp. viii, 288, illus., £9.95/\$12.95.

A paperback edition of Professor Carpenter's history of scurvy and its cure, first published in 1986 to wide acclaim (cf. *Med. Hist.* 1987, 31: 231–2), is now available. The strictly chronological structure of the book not only helps the reader to follow a surprisingly complex narrative, but also imparts real tension and pace. Commendably, the author has resisted low irony when chronicling the suffering of nineteenth-century Arctic explorers and twentieth-century conscientious objectors (those handy experimental subjects), who, for different reasons, ought to have been spared this dreadful disease. Above all, he has achieved the rare balance between biomedical exegesis and historical sensibility, and made that achievement look easy.

BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED

(The inclusion of a title does not preclude the possibility of subsequent review. Items received, other than those assigned for review, are ultimately incorporated into the collection of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.)

JACQUELINE M. ATKINSON, *Coping with stress at work: how to stop worrying and start succeeding*, Wellingborough, Northants, Thorsons, 1988, 8vo, pp. 144, £4.99, (paperback).

AMELIA D. AUCKETT, *Baby massage*, revised ed., Wellingborough, Northants, Thorsons, 1988, 8vo, pp. 75, illus., £3.99 (paperback).