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series of picturesque narratives about past plagues. The book does not propose a triumphal story of the only official "victory over [tropical] diseases", but a complex image of a mosaic of pathologies in flux. Some of these pathologies continue to be major health risks; others have receded, but this regression is often unstable, and the pathology may return if conditions change (the story of the only complete "victory over disease" in tropical medicine, the recent worldwide eradication of smallpox, is not included in the book).

The major drawback in choosing the practitioner's rather than the historian's perspective, is the relative neglect of pathways which did not lead to knowledge held as true today. The book's introduction explains that "the emphasis is on the most important and lasting findings, and dead ends that characterize scientific progress have hardly been covered". Consequently, many chapters are enlarged and enriched versions of standard "discovery accounts", that is, accounts of historical events which are held as true by the relevant community of experts and which are repeated in textbooks and review articles. They are often rich in unknown details and tell fascinating stories, but cannot be viewed as complete historical narratives. Not all the chapters, however, fit into the "standard account" pattern. Some, especially those on malaria, scurvy and rabies, were able to benefit from previous historical research, and they provide little-known historical data and a broader perspective on these pathologies.

The *Illustrated history of tropical diseases* is a very useful volume for the general public, for doctors and for teachers. It provides clearly presented information on tropical pathologies, information on doctors and researchers who have worked in this area, a general bibliography on the history of tropical medicine, a synthetic bibliography on each disease and a detailed index. Faithful to its name, the volume is richly illustrated, and contains a unique selection of historical drawings and photographs on tropical diseases. Some of the illustrations possess an intrinsic aesthetic quality, some are moving, and a few

are both. The fact that this book is reasonably priced adds to its usefulness as an iconographic resource and a teaching tool. Its pedagogic value could have been enhanced, however, by the addition of a synthetic historical introduction and/or postscript. Such an effort at synthesis could have explained how research on a specific disease (e.g., Ross's studies of malaria) or changes in a given area of studies (e.g., the development of techniques for studying viruses in the 1930s and 1940s) affected other diseases and other areas of investigation. It could thus have linked the individual chapters and conveyed a unity to the book which is a collection of essays on pathologies connected only by the fact that they can all be found in tropical zones. In addition, a historical framework could have displayed the frequently complicated ways in which the development of tropical medicine has been related to general historical developments, and thus could have heightened the interest of this work for the general public, and increased awareness of the importance of tropical diseases in shaping past and present events.

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Bernard Harris, *The health of the schoolchild: a history of the school medical service in England and Wales*, Buckingham and Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1995, pp. x, 260, £45.00 (hardback 0-335-09995-5), £16.99 (paperback 0-335-09994-7).

The main title of this book is misleading, and any reader who turns to it in the hope of an analysis of children's health, social or scientific, in the twentieth century, is in for a disappointment. Children as human beings, their afflictions and deprivations, their bodily and mental wellbeing, are a very ghostly presence here, described almost in passing, their condition assessed by occasional set-pieces on anthropometric data or death-rates from infectious disease. In reality, this book is about the school medical service, from its late-

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nineteenth-century antecedents to the National Health Service reorganization of 1974. It is a worthy, highly detailed, scrupulously documented, and very thorough account of the ups and downs of a social service; and it is terribly dull, and in places most laboriously written.

The first chapter proper, which relates the impact of the report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration of 1904, sets an ominous stage for what is to come. It borrows no zest from, for example, Dorothy Porter's lively essay on doctors and deterioration ('Enemies of race', *Victorian Studies*, 1991—not listed in Harris's bibliography) but regurgitates in paraphrase and direct quotation chunks of evidence from the Committee minutes, prefaced by leaden lead-ins: 'He considered that', 'He wrote that', 'He claimed that', 'He argued that', and so on.

The bitterness of these complaints springs from my own disappointment with this book. Bernard Harris is an able historian, who has written lucid and compelling articles on anthropometric history, one of which at least has achieved classic status. What is it about twentieth-century administrative/social policy history that stifles the historian's imagination, and turns a stylish pen turgid as ancient ink? Maybe the problem lies in the material—in the overwhelming wealth of data on administrative and political minutiae which has survived in official papers and professional journals. Such plenty too easily overcomes the historian's wider view of the wood, as distinct from the trees, of his chosen subject area; just as sheer volume and constraints of time compel him to narrow his range of sources. Reconceptualized as a history of children's health, in which the school medical service played a more or less significant part, this might have been an altogether livelier volume.

A greater range of sources might have both broadened and enriched this account. Oral history, surely, could have furnished a contribution, as could non-official writings—memoirs and novels. Some feeling for the wider historical context of the material presented would also have been welcome. How

could Harris baldly present a paragraph on the improvement of children's teeth during World War II (p. 171) without some mention of the impact of rationing on the manufacture and consumption of sweets, and of the world of child preferences and family values which lay behind the peacetime carious teeth? Harris is sceptical about the overall impact of the school medical service, which expended most of its energies in inspecting children above anything else; it is a pity that he did not achieve the broader and more informed account of children's health in the twentieth century which his main title implies.

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Martin Dinges (ed.), *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie. Länder—Schulen—Heilkunde*, Munich, C H Beck, 1996, pp. 445, illus., DM 58.00 (3-406-40700-5).

In his book *Facts and fallacies in the name of science* (1952; 2nd ed., 1957), Martin Gardner dismissed homeopathy as a form of quackery, identifying it as the "first medical cult of any importance in America"; homeopathy's founder, the German medical doctor Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), was made a figure of fun, and his main book, *Organon der rationellen Heilkunde* (1810), a source of ridicule; devotees of homeopathy were put down as superstitious simpletons, to be bracketed with believers in flying saucers.

Much has changed in the approximately four decades since Gardner derided the father and followers of homeopathy. No longer used as a source of ridicule, they have become the subject of serious and first-rate historical scholarship. Nothing could illustrate the new state of affairs better than the splendid collection of seventeen contributions of this volume, competently edited, introduced and provided with a concluding chapter by the Stuttgart historian Martin Dinges.

What has brought about this fundamental shift in the appreciation of homeopathy's antecedents? *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie*