

Book Reviews

On sects. The Buffalo team have edited the text (although in certain places I should prefer to smooth out some of the harsher idiosyncratic late Latin), translated it into English accurately and elegantly, and equipped it with a useful series of notes, relating it particularly to late Alexandrian teaching methods in logic and philosophy.

Later still, much of Agnellus' commentary (or his source) was taken over and expanded by an Alexandrian Greek, John. In 1185, it was turned into Latin by Burgundio, and was printed in the 1490 edition of Galen's works. Dr Pritchett provides an excellent text of this translation, and his notes draw attention to parallels in other medical and philosophical texts.

Two major problems remain; the relationship between these two texts, and their links with fifth-century Alexandria. For Pritchett, the Ravenna commentary is a "first version" by John, who revised it, adding a new and enlarged preface. Yet the attribution to John is so doubtful, and the evidence in favour of Agnellus' existence so strong, that it is better to believe that a later (and different) author (with Agnellus' commentary before him?) carried out little more than a stylistic updating of Agnellus' lectures, to which he added a fairly typical Alexandrian preface. If this plagiarizer was John, his standing in the eyes of certain scholars is considerably diminished.

But is the commentary in fact the work of Agnellus? Did he too take over, without acknowledgement, large chunks of a predecessor's lecture? A possible clue that this might be so comes in Vatican, pal. lat. 1090, s. xv. (known to Pritchett, but not to Buffalo), which ascribes Agnellus' commentary to Gessius. This is perhaps the most distinguished of the Alexandrian teachers of medicine in the late fifth century, "whose diagnoses shone like a beacon to the sick". His was a name to conjure with, but I doubt whether it would have been well known enough to a Western scribe in the later Middle Ages to be interpolated in place of Agnellus. If the ascription to Gessius is right, then both Agnellus and "John" can be convicted of taking over large amounts of someone else's lectures to give in their own – a situation not entirely absent today from our lecture halls.

Whatever view is taken on the authorship, we must be grateful to Dr Pritchett for his clear text, and, still more, to the Buffalo group for translating this most difficult of Latin into intelligible English and for setting it clearly in the proper context of education in late antiquity.

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CHRISTOPHER J. MAGGS, *The origins of general nursing*, London, Croom Helm, 1983, 8vo, pp. viii, 183, £12.95.

Twenty years of near silence on the history of nursing have ended. Scholars have looked again at Brian Abel Smith's classic (*A history of the nursing profession*, London, Heinemann 1960), and have found it wanting. Christopher Maggs is among these; he seeks, not to replace the earlier work, but to complement it, and in doing so, to ask new questions and to offer new answers. His study is more about the nurses themselves than about leaders and reformers. It takes account of nursing as women's work. It promises to deal with nursing techniques, with what the nurse was taught, who she was, and where she went. A wide variety of published sources is employed, including a selection of novels, as well as hospital records from nine different institutions, and interviews with seventeen nurses. The result is a slim volume (less than 125 pages of text) with four core chapters in which the main evidence and argument is presented.

By far the most illuminating and enjoyable chapter is that based on the nurse in fiction. It is here that the theme of nursing as women's work, and the sexual politics of nursing really comes alive. The chapter on recruitment is also stimulating when – drawing from records of hospitals mostly outside London – it challenges received wisdom, portraying nurses much as other women workers, rather than as the paragons in which the leaders and their sympathizers would have us believe. The variety of recruits to nursing helps make sense of the discipline and attention to hierarchy described in the chapter on training. The material here is more familiar, though the comments on nursing skills and techniques are important and deserve mention.

Tracing careers in nursing, the topic of another substantive chapter, is a hazardous

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enterprise, and many gaps in our knowledge remain; however, Maggs confirms the lack of opportunity for trained nurses in voluntary hospitals, retrieves information about nursing agencies, and, by examining some job changes, begins to reevaluate thinking about the relationship between the voluntary and poor law sectors. All of this adds up to new ideas and interpretations and justifies the claim to complement Abel Smith.

Some of the problems might have receded in a longer account – for example, the questions a reader has in the presentation of the hospital records data and in the precise inferences drawn. The oral history material is also used disappointingly little in a book which claims to deal with the ordinary nurses rather than the leaders. Overall, however, it is easier to list the specific contributions made by this book than to pinpoint the general ones. In part this has to do with the concept of “occupational imperialism” said to be central but never fully explained. In part too, it has to do with women’s work – a theme which surfaces frequently but somehow seems not to be pulled together at the end. But perhaps there is another reason. The transition from PhD thesis to book is never an easy one, and I am left with an impression of author and publisher locked in combat – why else a substantive chapter masquerading as summary and conclusions? Why else an appendix which is included in the text and barely shorter than the chapter to which it is appended?

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JAMES C. WHORTON, *Crusaders for fitness. The history of American health reformers*, Princeton, N.J., and Guildford, Surrey, Princeton University Press, 1982, (reprint of 1942 ed.), 8vo, pp. xi, 359, illus., £14.60.

There are many fruitful approaches to writing the history of health campaigners, those prophets galvanizing every generation by denouncing orthodox medicine and preaching the salvation of the whole self through the redemption of bodily well-being. James Whorton has chosen a simple and attractive expedient, which makes for a highly readable book. In successive chapters, he offers ten snapshots, chronologically arranged, containing personal cameos of the leading pioneers of the generation, with shrewd and entertaining explorations of their hobby-horses and therapies. Starting with the Jacksonian era, Whorton first focuses on the followers of Samuel Thomson, exploring their faith in natural cures in the light of American primitivistic dreams of purity in the new continent, viewing orthodox physicians as corrupt residues of the Old World. He then steps sideways to examine that great patriarch of medical self-help, the Rev. Sylvester Graham, whose religiously inspired crusades preferred the Tablets of the Law to the tablets of the doctors. Combining Evangelical arguments for temperance with the phobia of gastroenteric over-excitation (derived in part from Broussais), Graham promoted high-fibre bran bread as the health food-in-chief. Chapter 3 broadens out more generally to examine the vegetarian lobby in the mid-nineteenth century, introducing William Alcott, whose career (together with that of the hydropathist, Mary Gove Nichols) forms the core of the next vignette, examining mid-century fears of decline, enervation, and degeneracy. Alcott was the prophet of physical self-discipline, aiming to regulate sexual intercourse down to an ideal of once a month (was Walter Shandy an Alcottian *avant la lettre*?). Chapter 5 moves into the era of Evolutionism and political Progressivism, when “hygienic” issues came to the fore, and preserving “purity” (sexual and racial) emerged as the nation’s prime anxiety. Yet the optimistic face of “hygienism” is also explored, using Horace Fletcher as a prism. Fletcher was the great advocate of individual self-realization through maximizing metabolic efficiency. The hallmark of an efficient gut was that it produced almost no waste products. The secret: low protein diets (red meat was putrescent flesh), and endless mastication (Fletcher was “the man who taught the world to chew”). Fletcher’s health and efficiency programme was taken a stage further by John Harvey Kellogg and his creed of muscular vegetarianism, playing on widespread fears of constipation, looking to Metchnikoffian aspirations for the prolongation of life, and producing spectacular “experimental” trials of strength on the track and in the field between carnivores and herbivores (tug-of-wars, marathons) to test the energy and stamina of vegetarians (the trials were doubtless good publicity for Kellogg’s food products). Dietary reform also fills Chapter 8,