

Book Reviews

W. J. SHEILS (editor), *The Church and healing*, (*Studies in Church History*, No. 19), Oxford, Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1982, 8vo, pp. xxiv, 440, £19.50.

This collection of essays represents a thoughtful, stimulating, and generally successful co-operative attempt by medical and ecclesiastical historians to study an important topic, the relationship between the Christian church and healing. As the preface and the last article make clear, religious healing within Christianity is not confined to the past, but has in the last twenty years come to the forefront, even in Anglicanism. A bishop resigning his see to take on a ministry of healing is an event of 1983, not 983. The contributors tackle many aspects of this broad subject – miracles, healing shrines, medical missions, religious and medical attitudes towards various diseases, even a Georgian Archbishop who had trained in medicine, Thomas Secker (who almost had a medieval predecessor in Faritius of Abingdon).

Perhaps the most interesting group of articles examines the relationship between religious healing and unorthodox, dissenting or Catholic religious traditions, both in England and abroad. The parallels over the centuries, from Byzantium to modern Ceylon, are close and suggestive, yet the genesis of this collection, papers given at two conferences, does not readily allow for interaction between the speakers. It also points to two major deficiencies, at opposite ends of the historical spectrum. Almost a century ago, the church historian Adolf von Harnack, in a celebrated article on medicine and early Christianity, emphasized that Christianity, from its inception, owed much of its success to its claims to healing. Many contributors fail to notice that this tension between secular and religious healing goes back to the gospel narratives themselves. A survey of this evidence, from both the New Testament and the early Church Fathers would have set this whole volume in a better perspective.

At the other extreme, although there are a few polite appeals to the evidence of anthropology, there is at times an underlying assumption that it is only Christian religious healing that is worth considering. Yet classical healing cults interacted with early Christianity, and, as Logie Barrow shows, spiritualism in the nineteenth century at times repudiated Christianity, while paralleling some of its techniques and results. The Sri Lankan healing shrines are not confined to Christianity, and their aims and methods are suggestively similar. Perhaps significantly, Mary Baker Eddy and her followers appear only very rarely in these pages. Whatever one's views on the central validity of Christian healing, the case is weakened by the failure to use modern medical and anthropological evidence for religious healing.

Finally, at a more local level, no study of the role of the Benedictines in the furthering of medicine in England can neglect Wellcome MS. 801A, described at length in the Supplement to Volume II of Moorat's 1973 catalogue, pp. 1464–1467. This MS, which contains the earliest known *Articella*, was written in S. Italy before 1200 and brought within a century to Bury St. Edmunds. Its importance for Salernitan medicine has been recently stressed by P. O. Kristeller, *La scuola medica di Salerno*, Salerno, 1980, but a review of its place in the history of English medieval medicine still remains to be done.

These critical comments should not be allowed to obscure the fact that this excellent collection of essays opens up a new and exciting vein of material for medical historians of any period. The editor and the Ecclesiastical History Society deserve our gratitude.

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AGNELLIUS OF RAVENNA, *Lectures on Galen's De sectis*, (Arethusa Monographs, VIII), Department of Classics, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1981, 8vo, pp. xviii, 181, [no price stated], (paperback).

C. D. PRITCHET (editor), *Iohannis Alexandrini Commentaria in librum De sectis Galeni*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1982, 8vo, pp. xi, 108, Dfl.36.00.

The medicine of late antiquity is only now being studied in its own right, rather than for what it can tell us about Galen or Hippocrates. These two editions go far towards making this medicine available to scholars, and complement each other in a fascinating way.

Some time in the late sixth or early seventh century, at Ravenna in N. Italy, a doctor called Simplicius heard and took down the lectures of a medical sophist, Agnellus, on Galen's book

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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