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of publication of *Psychopathia sexualis* is 1886 (and not 1866; see p. 27); William Battie had nothing to do with Bethlem Hospital (p. 25); etc. The chapter on Swiss psychiatry that follows finds the author on safer ground and his thumbnail sketch is lively and adequate. Some important references on this topic are missing, however, particularly Lunier's classical paper on 'De l'alienation mentale en Suisse' (1867). The third chapter (on treatments) is again weak, occasionally unfair (e.g., against ECT; p. 54), and sometimes controversial (e.g. on the usefulness of intravenous antidepressants, p. 54).

The second section totally justifies the publication of this book. It offers an original and well-documented account of the contributions of many important figures of Basle psychiatry. The material is organized biographically and the attempts by the author to identify links between his heroes and the ongoing intellectual scene in the rest of Europe are very successful. Some of the psychiatrists discussed (e.g. Wille and Rüdin) are better known to non-Swiss historians than others (e.g. Brunner, Wolff, Staehling, and a constellation of minor figures). Wille was presented in detail by Meyer (1973) but still remains an intriguing figure. Surprisingly, Dr Haenel does not mention Wille's superb paper on *Verwirrtheit* (1888), which is a crucial contribution to the development of the concept of delirium.

Dr Haenel writes in a terse and elegant German, and his book is a pleasure to read. Well-known and less well-known photographs have been interleaved, and misprints have been kept to a minimum. With this work, Haenel has rendered a great service to the psychiatry of his country, and the book should find a rightful place in all specialized libraries.

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DONALD B. TOWER, *Hensing, 1719. An account of the first chemical examination of the brain and the discovery of phosphorus therein*, New York, Raven Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. xvi, 407, illus., \$47.50.

As the author disarmingly admits in his preface, Hensing's name will mean nothing to most historians, while anatomists who identify him with the left superior colic ligament will discover that their eponym belongs to *this* Hensing's son. Johann Thomas Hensing (1683–1726) was, in fact, an Extraordinary Professor of Medicine at the Lutheran University of Giessen from 1717 until 1723, and from then till his early death, Professor of Chemical Philosophy. However, although he practised medicine, being Landphysicus for the Giessen region before taking his academic appointments, his writings were chiefly concerned with chemical, albeit iatrochemical, matters: the preparation of vitriols (sulphates), an investigation of Schwalbach water, and essays rejecting the claims of alchemy. (The *Bibliotheca Chemica* of John Ferguson, whose library is now at the University of Glasgow, is overlooked by Tower as a source of essays he has not been able to examine.) Professor Tower, as an eminent neurochemist himself, probably rightly sees Hensing's chemical examination of the brain as his most remarkable achievement. Presented as a Latin dissertation to the Giessen Medical Faculty in 1719, with Hensing as Chairman and his obscure Swedish student, Daniel Kellander, as silent Respondent, the essay begins with a long historical account of opinions concerning the "fatty" substance of the brain. This is followed by an interesting account of the brain's "analysis by fire", a procedure which Hensing emphasizes was done at his own expense "without spending public funds questionably" and undaunted by the odiferous consequences. Although Boyle is cited frequently, Hensing seems not to have read *The sceptical chymist*, for he concluded that the analysis demonstrated the fourfold elementary nature of matter.

After heating cattle brains with alum in closed vessels for several hours, Hensing found that small portions of the resulting mass spontaneously ignited in air – a phenomenon that Homberg had previously used to identify phosphorus in animal dung. For Hensing, phosphorus constituted the essential "light", "ether", or "fire" stored in the brain's reservoirs. Although both Homberg's and Hensing's alum technique probably released pyrophores rather than elementary phosphorus, Hensing's elegant and clear account stands as a remarkable example of early eighteenth-century analysis. The dissertation closes with a learned account of the discovery of phosphorus by Brand, Kunckel, and their successors.

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The rarity of the dissertation (a unique copy at the University of Marburg?) amply justifies Professor Tower's decision to produce a Latin transcription with facing English translation, notes, and commentary (pp. 223–315). He also provides a life of Hensing and a four-chapter survey, with illustrations, of "some of the political, socio-economic, cultural and scientific heritages and milieu" into which Hensing was born. While much of this material will be familiar to historians, the author's engaging synthesis of German and other wide-ranging sources is impressive and should attract more general readers to the volume. Professor Tower has also been handsomely served by his printer and publisher.

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WILLIAM COLEMAN, *Death is a social disease. Public health and political economy in early industrial France*, Madison and London, University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xxi, 322, £26.25.

Recent debates over the National Health Service in Britain and over the introduction of the Medicare health insurance system in Australia should serve to remind us once again that health in a modern society is as much an economic and political concern as it is a biological one. This has not always been the case, however. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, European political and economic theory tended to emphasize the sheer quantity of a population as a measure of national wealth, but it showed little interest in those features of human existence which we would locate today under the heading of "the quality of life". It was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that the health and life-expectancy of the population (as distinguished from its size) became important for political and economic theory.

This shift in emphasis on the part of social theorists was matched at the same time by the medical profession's growing interest in matters of public health – both as an area of philanthropic concern and as an avenue of collective professional advancement. The result of this convergence of interests was the flourishing of an extensive and many-faceted public health movement during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in France, Britain, and the United States. Coleman's book concentrates on the work of one of the leaders of this movement in France, Louis René Villermé, whose lifespan from 1782 to 1863 coincides almost exactly with the period of change just mentioned above.

In 1840, Villermé published one of the crowning studies of the early public health movement, his *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine et de soie*, which, together with earlier researches on disease and mortality rates throughout the whole population, constituted a powerful empirical argument that the urban working class in France suffered disproportionately from ill health and early death as compared with the rest of the population, and that poverty and unhygienic working conditions in the newly established factory system were the chief causes of this unhappy state of affairs. Ultimately, of course, death is the biological fate of every human; but the *excess* mortality of workers, Villermé traced to a social origin. Hence Coleman's catchy title, which neatly summarizes Villermé's position: *Death is a social disease*.

As a medical man, Villermé might have expected to follow up his social diagnosis with a therapeutic recommendation; and as an ex-army surgeon he might have been expected to couch his prescription in terms of strong administrative measures. In point of fact, however, nothing of the kind occurred: Villermé's work combined, in Coleman's phrase, "bold diagnosis and conservative therapy". The reason for this seemingly paradoxical combination is indicated in Coleman's subtitle: *Public health and political economy in early industrial France* – for it was the prevailing economic conception of the day that prevented Villermé's implicit indictment of the early factory system under capitalism from becoming an explicit call for social reform or revolution.

Committed to political liberalism and *laissez-faire* economics, Villermé viewed socialism, workers' associations, and state regulation of factory conditions with equal horror. One often thinks of Britain and the United States as typifying extreme *laissez-faire* attitudes and of France as typifying the centralized administrative tendency in government during the early