

Book Reviews

Taking into account the limitations of the genre itself and inevitable problems of focus which stem from multiple authorship, this book has gone some way towards achieving the editors's objectives. For example, the chapters dealing with ancillary staff and the impact of recent managerial changes are welcome additions to the historical profile of the hospital. The close relationship with the community is also explored, with a particularly interesting account of 'General practice since 1890' by R. C. N. Douglas. Throughout, there is plenty of comment on present-day issues.

Established institutions rarely require an excuse to commemorate their achievements. In both of these volumes, however, the celebrations have an added dimension. There is a sense of batten-down the historical cargo of the past in preparation for a storm of change anticipated in the near future. As a result, they may prove to be historically significant publications for reasons other than their ostensible contents.

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PAULINE M. H. MAZUMDAR (ed.), *Immunology 1930–1980: essays on the history of immunology*, Toronto, Wall & Thompson, 1989, 8vo, pp. ix, 298, illus., \$39.95.

This book originated in a workshop on the history of immunology held during the 6th International Congress of Immunology (Toronto, 1986), by a historian of this discipline, Pauline Mazumdar. The participants in this workshop were, with the exception of Anne-Marie Moulin, another historian, scientists attending the Toronto congress. The book remains faithful to the original concept of the workshop: a partially accidental gathering of immunologists—some of them eminent, some less known—who were asked to recount the history of their speciality. Unsurprisingly, they did so in their own way. Most of the papers in this collection follow the "textbook introduction" or "review article" models of writing the history of science: a brief survey of the official history of a specific domain, complete with chronology and references, which often mentions (favourably) the author's own contribution to the evolution of the field. Such essays may (and do) contain useful data and insight, but are usually less rich sources of information for the historian than "discovery accounts"—the personal stories of discoveries. The latter form is adopted by only three participants in the workshop (Roitt, Lawrence, and Abelev), and it is perhaps not by chance that their subjects of study (thyroid auto-immunity, "transfer factor", and cancer antigens) are marginal to the mainstream of immunological research. The last point perhaps merits further discussion. Paradoxically, the chance selection of the participants in the workshop allowed, perhaps unintentionally, for one of the most interesting features of the book: in addition to debates on several major issues in immunology, it contains detailed descriptions of some of the less known and less understood aspects of immunology. Notwithstanding the attempts to link the studies of less fashionable research topics to the main direction of immunological research (such as Lawrence's efforts to lump his poorly-understood specific "transfer factor" together with much better understood non-specific interleukins), the book conveys the impression that immunology is a far more heterogenous and perhaps also a more interesting discipline that its stereotyped, "Whiggish" image allows for.

The historical essays that open and close the book attempt to provide a global theoretical framework for recent developments in immunology. Pauline Mazumdar—who besides her introductory essay also contributed a highly interesting study on the origins of instructive theories of antibody formation—believes that the clonal selection theory may constitute such a framework. The publication of this theory (Burnet, 1957) was, she claims, a turning point in the history of immunology. It may account for its separation from bacteriology and its rapid development as a distinct, major biomedical speciality. The information contained in the book does not entirely support Mazumdar's view. The clonal selection theory indeed made possible the reconciliation of theories of antibody formation with the new findings on the synthesis of proteins, and thus undoubtedly played an important role in the recent development of immunological knowledge. But Ada, Nossal, and Talmage, who discuss the clonal selection theory here, explain that it became universally accepted only in the 1970s. According to

Talmage, this acceptance was not the result of an accumulation of experimental proofs in its favour but the consequence of the success of a new technology—monoclonal antibodies—based on the predictions of the clonal theory, from 1976 on. Clonal selection theory is thus, by itself, not sufficient to account for the rapid growth of immunology, which—as Mazumdar herself shows—had started already in the 1950s. Anne-Marie Moulin offers an additional explanation. She attributes a key role in the recent development of immunology to the rise of the notion of the immune system. This concept, she proposes, is an ecumenical metaphor, and it owes its success to its linguistic versatility and to its ability to answer the need for communication not only between cells but between the professionals of immunity as well. This is an interesting insight, which merits further exploration. However, in this work neither she nor Mazumdar advance beyond general claims. In her introductory essay Mazumdar does make a few brief comments on the essays and tries to link them to the clonal selection theory, but the book lacks a consistent analysis, from the historian's point of view, of the raw information supplied by the scientists. This is regrettable, because such an analysis—coupled perhaps with editorial guidance to the authors—might have transformed a book in which interesting insights are buried in a sea of “official history”, into a more useful tool for the historian of science.

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JOAN AUSTOKER and LINDA BRYDER (eds.), *Historical perspectives on the role of the MRC: essays on the history of the Medical Research Council of the United Kingdom and its predecessor, the Medical Research Committee, 1913–1953*, Oxford University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xi, 259, £30.00.

In the mid-1970s Sir Arthur Landsborough Thomson published a two-volume history of the Medical Research Council, naturally influenced by his own position as the Second Secretary of the Committee, subsequently Council, for almost 40 years. Now Drs Austoker and Bryder provided a collection of essays, some of which notably extend the Thomson material, on historical perspectives of the role of the MRC, as it is commonly called.

In the first chapter, Linda Bryder explores the process by which the scheme to allocate “one penny per insured person” for tuberculosis research, inaugurated by the National Insurance Act of 1911, was transformed into a broad-based organization to fund medical research. In particular the influences are examined of the first Secretary to the MRC, Walter Morley Fletcher, and of Simon Flexner from the Rockefeller Institute in New York in determining the research priorities of the Committee. Tuberculosis was very quickly relegated from those priorities, and despite encouraging therapeutic and preventative developments abroad, Bryder argues that the MRC failed to develop and support research initiatives in the very area for which it was established. Walter Morley Fletcher gets a chapter to himself, an analysis by Joan Austoker of his strong belief of the pre-eminence of basic biomedical research and his skirmishes with other authorities over the conduct and control of medical research. A brief account of the work of the National Institute for Medical Research is provided by the two editors, whilst the remaining chapters illustrate some research policies that *were* supported.

Linda Bryder focuses on public health research, especially that associated with the Public Health Laboratory Service, and explores territorial disputes between the MRC and the Ministry of Health over the support of bacteriological work. A complementary approach to public health is taken by Celia Petty in her chapter on nutritional research, as the tensions between advocates of clinical, epidemiological, and primary “pure” research begin to be emphasized, a theme further developed by Helen Jones in her wider discussion of industrial health and its social implications. Similarly, unease between clinical practice and experimental medicine surfaces in David Cantor's account of MRC support for experimental radiology between the two World Wars, a paper that documents the disagreements between Fletcher from the MRC and the Presidents of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons (Moynihan) and Physicians (Dawson) and affords a demonstration of the creation and emergence of a medical speciality. Social and political