

## Book Reviews

In analysing the attitudes and activities of the reformers, Meckel makes little effort to measure the actual rates and trends of morbidity and mortality. He makes relatively little use of statistics, believing that the debates over the impact of specific reforms on infant mortality rates will necessarily be inconclusive. He tends to ignore the demographic and "child survival" literature concerned with the economic context of family planning, and the relationships between birth control and infant mortality, infant mortality and breast feeding, abortion and maternal mortality. Indeed, his complete lack of reference to either birth control or abortion is surprising. Did American reformers make no connection between birth control, infant mortality, abortion, and maternal mortality? And should this larger context not be part of a critical historical analysis?

Meckel certainly makes a strong case that the more the United States promoted medical care as an antidote for infant mortality, the more it lost sight of the social dimensions of maternal and child health. He is critical of the Sheppard-Towner Act, for example, for its relatively narrow focus on health services. Similarly, he argues that while Medicaid has done much to equalize access to maternal and child health care, it has been far from an adequate solution to the problem of infant mortality. His passionate conclusion argues for a systematic maternity-leave policy with wage compensation for working pregnant and new mothers and a national investment in day care. He would make maternal and child health services a uniform federal programme as a right of motherhood, rather than a concession to poverty. If, as he concludes, 150 years of battling infant mortality has taught us anything at all, it is that we need a more comprehensive approach to saving the babies.

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JAMES HARVEY YOUNG, *Pure food: securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906*, Princeton University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xiii, 312, \$29.95.

The final chapter of this book reviews the very substantial scholarly literature on the enactment of the federal pure food and drug laws in the United States in 1906. In the literature, the laws appeared chiefly as symbolic of changes in the political economy, not as important in and of themselves. Only in the past few years have the laws come into the historical literature as important public health measures as well as symptoms of the bureaucratization of society or the relative importance of business hegemony and the consumer movement.

In the end, their public health significance, like all of public health, involved political as well as social processes. Why did it take two generations for the American federal government to enact such laws? Young, the author of classic volumes on the powerful forces opposed to such laws (the proprietary medicine vendors), takes what he characterizes (p. 291) as a pluralistic approach to account both for the periods of apparent inaction as well as the circumstances in which laws actually made it through Congress. He has to follow several quite independent threads, for the events involved substantial complexity. It is his real achievement to synthesize the existing scholarship—of which a substantial part is his own—with the sources in devising an understandable and comprehensive account of the pure food and drug laws.

Young has the advantage of a thorough knowledge of more general medical history. The first federal law, the drug import law of 1848, grew out of concern for medical therapeutics in the nineteenth century. First, adulteration of drugs exacerbated heroic dosing. But then the attempts of physicians to regulate the human "system" with drugs emphasized exactitude in prescribing. The 1848 law, however, was not enforced effectively and anyway did not control the domestic producers.

Meantime, across the Atlantic, British agitation concerning poisonous adulterations of food moved across the Atlantic. In addition, legitimate producers and merchandisers in America joined in campaigns against their dishonest competitors. Beginning in 1879, every Congress considered one or more bills to regulate adulteration. All the while, a number of individual states legislated—mostly ineffectually—against the evils of ingested adulterations and poisons, sometimes in foods, sometimes in drugs, sometimes both. Over the years, reformers concerned

## Book Reviews

with these subjects developed two goals representing two separate strategies: forbidding only harmful ingredients and additions, on the one hand, and, on the other, demanding labelling of ingredients to inform the consumer. Milk was often the focus of independent campaigns.

Protecting the public from impure ingestions also became an important element in the public health movement as it developed in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the rise of national marketing made it increasingly necessary that regulation of the businesses in which adulteration occurred should be federal.

Still more complications appeared when commercial interest appeared nakedly in controversies set off by technology, when merchandisers could offer tinned foods instead of fresh, glucose instead of sugar, oleomargarine instead of butter, blended instead of aged whiskey. All became deeply entangled in the larger pure food and drugs debate, and at the same time both public health advocates and a reformed medical profession weighed in against proprietary medicines, such as babies' soothing syrups that contained opiates. Finally, in 1890, European embargoes forced a federal meat-inspection act—for exported, not domestic, goods, however. This was followed by the Biologics Control Act of 1902 to make vaccines safe—another sign of medical as well as legal change.

Young's climax is an account of the actual legislative struggles that followed these preliminaries; of the political manoeuvring of Harvey W. Wiley, who ultimately moved drugs as well as foods into the concerns of the Division of Chemistry in the US Department of Agriculture; and of the muckrakers both before and after Upton Sinclair's exposé of meat packing in *The jungle* (1906). Young's account is in turn inspiring, discouraging, and amusing.

Young enriches his narrative with asides not only on American politics, demography, and business but the history of American science, professions, and education. In view of the breadth of his research, it is unlikely anyone will soon again attempt a comprehensive narrative of the development of American Pure Food and Drug Acts—even to answer Young's teasing but unanswered query as to the ultimate meaning of "pure".

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NEIL WEIR, *Otolaryngology: an illustrated history*, London, Butterworth, 1990, 8vo, pp. 290, illus., £39.50.

This detailed history of the formation and development of ear, nose, and throat surgery reflects intensive endeavour by the author, himself an active surgeon in this field. Basing the work on R. Scott Stevenson and Douglas Guthrie's *A history of otolaryngology* of 1938, he dwarfs their modest volume to provide a mine of information profusely illustrated with not only photographs of physicians and scientists who contributed to the art but also drawings of diagnostic equipment, operative instrumentation, and techniques responsible for illuminating these mysterious recesses and cavities of the body, so long inaccessible to vision and treatment.

Mr Weir's enthusiasm to name and date every conceivable contributor has deflected him, perhaps, from arranging the work more usefully. Thus the contents page is spartan and could helpfully include the sub-headings found within each chapter; the illustrations are not numbered and although most are located next to appropriate text, there are irritating exceptions. In the absence of numbered references, the bibliographies at the end of chapters are impressive yet remain difficult to relate to the text. Omissions of detail are inevitable and one looks in vain for the aural syringe, J. Hippolyte Belloc's sound, and acknowledgement of William Morton's association with ether anaesthesia.

Nonetheless, I commend this book to otolaryngologists, maxillo-facial, plastic and general surgeons, anaesthetists, neurologists, pathologists, historians, and others who will be fascinated by many intriguing events such as Joseph Toynbee's dissection of over 2,000 temporal bones to elucidate the pathology of the inner ear—and his extraordinary death—and the Professor of Singing Manuel Garcia's brilliant ingenuity in visualizing the vocal cords in action for the first time.

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