

Book Reviews

The Revolutionary period did (after some hesitation by those who dreamed of a society without hospitals) bring about the conversion of the main houses of Christian care for the sick poor in the large urban centres (*Hôtels-Dieu*, *Charités*, and *Hôpitaux Généraux*) to medical institutions concerned with the study and treatment of disease. The process of medicalization of Paris hospitals has been well documented by Michel Foucault, Erwin Ackerknecht, and others.

The medical revolution has tended to overshadow the "medical old regime". As a result of this perspective (as well as the destruction of many of the relevant archives at Paris), our knowledge of hospital medicine in eighteenth-century France, as it was lived by patients, religious, medical and administrative personnel, and perceived by the rest of society, remains obscure.

Unfortunately, the present collection of eleven papers does not present any new insights or interpretations. The proceedings of a colloquium, the collection is poorly organized, repetitive, and palpably in need of editorial attention. This is especially evident in the prolix introduction by Pierre Huard and M.-J. Imbault-Huart, and, to a lesser extent, in three other papers by the same team. Their discussion of the hospice of the Paris Royal College of Surgery, for example, dwells on previously published material while missing an opportunity to consider patients or diseases. They accuse "American authors", singling out this reviewer, of mistaking the small hospice for "la grande école chirurgicale parisienne". Suffice it to say that I never made such a claim. (Ironically, it is the French authors who grossly mistake the scope of the small model surgical hospital by stating that it received ten times as many patients as it in fact did.)

Vincent Comiti's brief discussion of the distribution of patients and disease categories is the only paper to address these central questions. Pierre Niaussat (French naval hospitals) and Marcel Baudot (archival sources) provide facts, lists, and hints for further research. Adrien Carré's sketch of English naval hospitals argues for their inferiority to French counterparts. Jean Filliozat reproduces an eyewitness description of Paris medical institutions left by a Swedish visitor in 1770–71. Jean-Pierre Kerneis's 'J.-B. Cassard and the birth of hospital medicine at Nantes in 1717' is the only piece of research based on hospital records in this disappointing collection.

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JOHN S. HALLER jr., *American medicine in transition 1840–1910*, Urbana, Chicago, and London, University of Illinois Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xii, 457, illus., \$17.50.

John Haller is one of a growing group of American historians who have turned their attention to medical developments. Following in the footsteps of the late Richard H. Shryock, they have with ever-increasing sophistication analysed and described both the evolution of medical ideas and medical practices as well as the culture in which they took place. Haller, for instance, has written some informative articles on therapeutic practices such as bleeding and on the use of calomel. These now find their way into this book.

Although the book is long and does contain some informative sections, it does not deserve a long review. It is, unfortunately, very disappointing, because I hoped that a good synthesis of American medicine had finally appeared. This is not the case. Professor Haller is not on very secure ground in many parts of the book, though his range of references will be useful. He has relied on secondary works to some extent and on the medical journal literature extensively.

The most telling fault of Haller's book is a conceptual void. How can one come to grips with the transformation of medicine by virtually totally ignoring the role, and developments of hospitals and those doctors who did so much to make the hospital the centre of twentieth-century medicine, the surgeons?

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WAYLAND D. HAND (editor), *American folk medicine*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. viii, 347, £3.50 (paperback).

WAYLAND D. HAND, *Magical medicine. The folkloric component of medicine in the folk*

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belief, custom, and ritual of the peoples of Europe and America, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xxvii, 345, illus., £13.50.

Both of these books deal with folk medicine but whereas *American folk medicine* is a collection of 1973 conference papers edited by Professor Hand, *Magical medicine* is a collection of his own selected essays covering essentially the last decade. The basic tenet of both is that the idea of "medicine" is differentially interpreted and defined according to social, historical, religious, and cultural context. Whereas the former gives individual case histories to describe the variety of folk medicinal practices, the latter tends to be thematic and explores the general ideas and theories which may explain this variety.

American folk medicine gives us a wide range of case histories, from the role of a mole's heart in curing epilepsy, through illness as a result of a spiritual imbalance to the explanation of birthmarks on newly born children as a result of a mother's misbehaviour during pregnancy. This rich variety of ethnographic essays documents individual beliefs and practices, social context and world view, sorcery and shamanism from Pennsylvania to Mexico, and traces the European ancestry of many folk practices and superstitions.

Magical medicine concentrates on what the author calls the magical elements of folklore that have been incorporated into curing ritual both in the New and Old worlds. The ideas of the magical transference of disease and of disease as divine retribution or as the result of animal intrusion into the body are all dealt with at length, as is the magical symbolism involved in passing one's body through a tree's bowed trunk in order to cure hernia or whooping-cough. The antiquity of such practices in Europe and their possible transference to the Americas during the sixteenth century is also explored, as is the possibility that there may be a common substrate of folk medicine held by all the world's peoples which stretches back into the palaeolithic past.

Folk medicine, it seems, is predicated upon mythic explanations which are themselves the rationalization of the irrational. This process of rationalization is at the heart of man's uniqueness, and thus folk medicine is seen as an integral part of his physiological and cultural development.

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BRIAN EASLEA, *Witch-hunting, magic and the new philosophy. An introduction to the debates of the scientific revolution 1450–1750*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. xii, 283, [no price stated].

Written under the inspiration of Herbert Marcuse, this provocative book provides a breezy and sometimes snide introduction to the history of the scientific revolution, with the larger goal of placing the origins of modern science in their socially and sexually repressive context. In basic argument it is similar to Carolyn Merchant's, *The death of nature. Women, ecology and the scientific revolution* (Harper & Row, 1980). Easlea argues that witch-hunting was the panicky response of men who felt threatened by women and the devil. Since it was angels that made the stars revolve in the late medieval sky, Easlea can suggest connexions between demonology and the new astronomy. In practice, this argument only begins to make full sense in the mid-seventeenth century, when Henry More, Joseph Glanvill, and others attempted to locate spirits in the natural world of experience. And so Easlea's book proceeds along two fairly separate tracks until about 1650. It is perhaps for this reason that the period 1450–1600 comes off rather strangely, with no concern for anatomy and peculiarly little understanding for Renaissance magic. Easlea invokes the philosophy and religion of Paracelsus to show how subversive and potentially atheist natural magic could be, but his arguments seem to rest on an extremely imperfect grasp of whatever does not exist in English translation. The author does not do justice to the intense Christian piety of Paracelsus; and unfortunately for him most of the religious magic of the sixteenth century is still locked up in Latin.

After spending time briefly outlining the theories of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo on the scientific side, and of Institoris, Sprenger, Weyer, and Bodin on the witchcraft side, Easlea brings the assembled arguments together. He argues effectively that the Christian mechanical philosophers of the seventeenth century were engaged in a war against Aristotle on