

Book Reviews

old age was viewed "as a distinctive and irreversible segment of the life cycle" (p. 60). Moreover, "physicians had little control over this process. They could not stop the cell from evolving into its senile state, nor were they able to isolate the mechanism that controlled aging" (p. 63).

Increasingly influential on the Continent, this new conception of senescence was not adopted by Anglo-American medicine until the latter part of the century, and then with significant modifications. In the United States, vitalistic models of the ageing process continued to be widely influential, and the climacteric came to be viewed as marking the crucial transition, for both men and women, between middle age and senescence. The latter stage, in turn, was characterized by diseases "fundamentally different from illnesses common to other age groups", not least in their inevitable outcome – increasing disability and death (p. 73). The mental faculties, in particular, were destined to decay, as the senile brain "no longer possessed the plasticity necessary to formulate new patterns" (p. 76).

Such pessimistic conclusions helped to promote and justify a policy of isolating and institutionalizing the elderly; and to lend "scientific" support to the proposition that "the mere entrance into senescence [constituted] a sure and incontestable sign of uselessness" (p. 97). Ironically, this tendency to stigmatize and segregate the old was then further accentuated in the early twentieth century by the development of pensions for the elderly, which, when linked to mandatory, age-based retirement policies, completed the link between old age and inevitable dependency.

This is a persuasive and on the whole well-supported argument. But it could readily have been made in the space of a journal article. As it is, a skimpy text is padded by repetition and redundancy. I lost count of the number of "as we have seens" and "as has been noteds"; an example, I fear, of the pernicious effects of the American "publish or perish" syndrome.

Andrew Scull
University of California, San Diego

GENEVIEVE MILLER (editor), *Letters of Edward Jenner and other documents concerning the history of vaccination*, Baltimore, Md., and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. xxix, 145, £12.75.

This collection of 102 letters and notes written by Edward Jenner between 1783 and the year of his death, 1823, was established by the late Baltimore physician Henry Barton Jacobs and given by him to the William H. Welch Medical Library at Johns Hopkins in 1932. With a few exceptions, these letters are previously unpublished and not included in LeFanu's *Bibliography of Edward Jenner*. The late Henry Sigerist initiated the project of arranging the letters for publication; the task has now been triumphantly completed by Dr Miller. Thoroughly at home in the period and the literature on smallpox prevention before and after Jenner's discovery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on which she has written so lucidly in *The adoption of inoculation for smallpox in England and France*, Genevieve Miller has edited and annotated the letters with copious notes, no less welcome for being inevitably somewhat repetitive. Jenner's comments reveal his intense preoccupation with the furtherment of the vaccination cause; occasionally, this preoccupation is allowed to extend to his own reputation and the size of the reward he felt should be due to him from a government grateful for his life-saving discovery.

More endearing are the occasional sidelights thrown on his abiding interest in general natural history, especially as applied to his own gardening activities – the superiority of his white strawberries over his "only common Alpine" red ones, and the joy and wonder of harvesting a home-grown "Goosberry" tipping the scales at "five Drachms full weight". On the other hand, one does not have to be an anti-vivisectionist to be a little surprised and dismayed to find this country physician of gentle disposition suggesting to Charles Parry that there "must be a short cut from the Stomach to the Bladder. . . . What if we were to fill the Stomach of a Puppy with Mercury, first tying up the Intestine, and then give it a good squeeze?"

Of no less interest are the fifteen letters in the Appendix exchanged between contemporaries of Jenner and also relating to vaccination. There is a brief note from Joseph-Ignace Guillotin in

Book Reviews

humanitarian mood, not at all intent on the use of infamous machines for decapitation but rather concerned with the procurement of vaccine for the general good. There is also a letter from John Coakley Lettsom to a local surgeon with evidence of at least one reason why the necessity for re-vaccination was for so long ignored in this country. Lettsom wrote: "About three years ago, some children of the Foundling hospital were inoculated with the Cowpock and for the sake of experiment (which however is now totally unnecessary, as a person is known to remain unsusceptible of the small pox, after having really had the Cowpock) they have been recently inoculated with the smallpox, without any one of these having taken the disease . . .". If they had waited longer, or repeated the experiments after another three years, the result might have been different. Yet another letter bears witness to the attempts by the East India Company to introduce vaccination to the somewhat reluctant inhabitants of Canton, who presumably resisted change from their age-old accepted practices of variolation.

All in all, these letters offer a remarkably rounded picture of Jenner the man and help to redress the balance between "excessive eulogy and unfounded invective" from which, as Dr Miller points out in her foreword, Jenner's reputation has suffered for more than a century and a half.

Lise Wilkinson
Department of Virology
Royal Postgraduate Medical School

ESTHER FISCHER-HOMBERGER, *Medizin vor Gericht. Gerichtsmedizin von der Renaissance bis zur Aufklärung*, Berne, Stuttgart, and Vienna, Hans Huber, 1983, 8vo, pp. 487, illus., SFr. 83.00/DM. 92.00.

In a brief introduction, the author explains the scope of her work: a history of ideas or "mentalités" concerning forensic medicine from the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century. Fischer-Homberger makes it clear that hers is a book concentrating on representative published sources – some extensively quoted – concerned with the role of health professionals in legal questions. The intention is to present chronologically a number of important sources for this field, thereby stimulating further research.

From the outset, Professor Fischer-Homberger seems aware of the opportunities provided by such publications to assess the social and political dimensions of healing. Indeed, forensic matters always expose societal concerns and conflicts demanding medical expertise. In depositions and verdicts, values and attitudes are articulated that would otherwise remain hidden from public view. Although she wisely stays away from specific sociological models, the author nevertheless comments extensively on the context in which both medical thought and practice evolved for three centuries.

The text is divided into three quite different sections. The first briefly describes the salient developments in forensic medicine from the code of Hammurabi until the Carolina rules promoted by Charles V in 1532. A second part examines the legal roles of surgeons, midwives, apothecaries, and lawyers. Then developments in medical ethics are closely related to professional status and knowledge. Finally, the third section – two-thirds of the book – is devoted to issues with forensic value: age determination, mental capacity, virginity and sterility, conception and pregnancy, abortion, infanticide, the relationship of wounds and poison intake to death, etc.

This work is a veritable mine of information, supplemented by seventy judicial cases extracted from published sources. Since it covers a great deal of new ground, Fischer-Homberger's analysis raises more questions than it answers and is certainly bound to stimulate further studies. Some readers will look in vain for a concluding overview – never intended – and others, especially in Anglo-American countries, may wonder why their own forensic medical tradition remained undeveloped during the period under scrutiny. In all, however, the author accomplishes her goal: to demonstrate the importance of studying forensic issues since they inevitably draw on knowledge and values reflecting the contemporary state of medical art and professional development.

Guenter B. Risse
University of Wisconsin