

Book Reviews

the Ethiopian artist Admassu Mammo based on recent famine conditions in the country; and Pankhurst provides an introduction ('A forward view', pp. 4–6) in which he discusses current efforts to implement long-term solutions to the threat of famine in Ethiopia, and deplores current international aid facilities for their tendency to link development aid to considerations of economy and power politics.

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JUDITH WALZER LEAVITT and RONALD I. NUMBERS (editors), *Sickness and health in America. Readings in the history of medicine and public health*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986, 4to, pp. x, 550, \$32.50 (\$14.95 paperback).

We welcome the second edition of this work, first published in 1978 (see review in *Med. Hist.*, 1979, 23: 360). Eighteen new essays are added, with new sections on 'Race and Medicine', 'Women and Medicine', and 'The Art and Science of Medicine'. Some older articles have been deleted. It is a comprehensive review of sickness and health in America and encompasses efforts to prevent or cure illness—their failure and success. There are thirty-six essays, each by a different contributor, including both editors, who work in the professorial department of the History of Medicine in Wisconsin University, Madison, USA.

The first essay is, to my mind, a strange introduction, dealing as it does with masturbation, especially the contribution of Tissot. Engelhardt, its author, tries to equate its effects with those of alcohol and drug addiction—surely illogical, because these are harmful diseases of society at large. The second essay is also psychogenic. It deals with neurasthenia—another example of the American obsession with neurosis.

The section on medical education is one of the most interesting and discusses the teaching of general (internal) medicine in America, stressing the problems and the place of Osler in helping to overcome them. Virginia Drachman's contribution considers women doctors and their initial difficulties in being accepted.

Are black people medically different from whites? Recent studies suggest that they are. They possess greater resistance to yellow fever and malaria and to heat, but suffer more from genetic disorders such as sickle-cell anaemia. Allan Brandt's essay on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study of 1932 in Alabama is a salutary reminder of the role of racism in research—in this case blacks not Jews, but note the date!

The late George Rosen's discussion on health centres questions the need for them—protagonists here should read it.

There is a table of contents and an index, and each essay ends with copious notes and details of the author. There are ten pages of further reading and a list of abbreviations of journal titles.

This is an excellent review, which can be recommended to the general or to the specialist reader. It is very reasonably priced.

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EDWARD BABAYAN, *The structure of psychiatry in the Soviet Union*, New York, International Universities Press, 1985, 8vo, pp. ix, 336, illus., \$40.00.

So far as one can make out, this is primarily the work of a Soviet psychiatrist (no information is given about Yu G. Shashina, Babayan's collaborator), and has been translated by two others, but very poorly, sprinkled with such neologisms as "idioplasm", "parabiosis", and "stressogenics". It has no references and contains no data or systematic information; the preface states that it has "concentrated on the organisation and delivery of psychiatric and narcological care, and on the judicial, legislative and legal standards adopted". Historians will be mostly

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interested in the first chapter, which gives a brief overview of Soviet psychiatry up to recent times.

After fighting through the endless verbiage, one might draw the conclusion that the only scientific work of any consequence done in psychiatry was before 1917. The single major exception would be A. R. Luria, who is completely ignored in the book, except for one appearance of his name in a list of Soviet scientists; this extraordinary treatment, which is presumably because he was Jewish, is in contrast to the repeated mentions and extended space given to such mediocre apparatchiks as Snezhnevsky. Medical hegemonism seems to be triumphant, since even nursing and occupational therapy only appear in a medical context, and other professions are not even mentioned.

It is not surprising to find that the political misuse of psychiatry in the USSR is not referred to, but the text is regularly interrupted with allegations such as that ECT "has become all but a repressive measure applied to even healthy people" in America. There are some short accounts of important pre-revolutionary figures like Bechterev, but the lack of any references or supporting details make these of very limited use. One is told yet again that psychiatric day-hospitals began in Moscow in 1931–2, but this tantalizing morsel is not filled out with the kind of information that historians need. Altogether, a worthless piece of propaganda and a sadly missed opportunity.

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HENRY HOBHOUSE, *Seeds of change. Five plants that transformed mankind*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985, 8vo, pp. x, 245, illus., £15.00.

Too many people with too little knowledge have clambered aboard the "green medicine" bandwagon in recent years, so that any further book with a title even vaguely suggestive of that is liable to be approached with some suspicion. Certainly, it was with some scepticism, even a sinking heart, that this reviewer turned to the opening pages of a volume handicapped by the revelation on the dust-jacket that the author is a one-time *Daily Express* journalist (a former "William Hickey" no less, according to the publicity handout).

That initially unfavourable reaction was very quickly dispelled. This is a thoughtful, thought-provoking, extremely readable work based on a wide and careful sifting of the secondary literature (the notes, placed at the end of each chapter, are alone more fascinating than many other authors' texts). All that is lacking is a little spicing of wit.

The five crop plants discussed are quinine, sugar, tea, cotton, and the potato. Though only one of these is a medicine, three of the others have profoundly influenced human nutrition and all five abundantly support the author's thesis that certain of the major twists and turns in world history have come about as a result of a critical dependence on particular botanical species. Much of what he has to relate is not, of course, all that new; and in the case of the potato, especially, has been covered already, with great comprehensiveness, in Salaman's famous work. But it is nevertheless useful to have such a diversity of information brought together and assessed from a macro-historical viewpoint. It is heartening to be reminded, too, that it is not only specialist scholars who are capable of producing *haute vulgarisation* of a standard that can command respect. Too many of the deeply knowledgeable will always lack the time or the inclination or the writing skills to go to the trouble of passing on what they have learned to the general reading public in a suitably palatable form: they need lay allies like Mr Hobhouse if that crucial but too-neglected task is not to go by default.

David E. Allen