

## Book Reviews

other persons who are mentioned because at some time something has been named after them. Historians may hope that future editions will not prune too much on the ground of obsolescence.

Manifestly there is no outright “best buy”: Firkin & Whitworth contain material not to be found elsewhere, and similarly much that they do not cover is available elsewhere. All depends on what you seek. They can correct in their next edition one trap for the seeker: an unfamiliar anomaly has consigned all the names starting with Mac or its variants to the end of all others starting with M, as if Mac were the next letter of the alphabet. Thus six people of Scots origin have been consigned to inaccessibility, unless by the index—but there is no index! The presence of this anomaly has in no way biased the present review.

**John M Forrester, Edinburgh**

**A W Sloan, *English medicine in the seventeenth century*, Bishop Auckland, Durham Academic Press, 1996, pp. x, 215, illus., £12.00 (1-900838-00-1).**

Since the publication of Charles Webster’s *The great instauration* some twenty years ago, there has been a considerable amount of scholarly attention focused on medicine in seventeenth-century England. There is therefore a need for a new work of synthesis which would introduce the historiography to students and general readers. This book is not it.

Professor Sloan is a retired physiologist with an interest in history, but he appears to have read nothing published in the 1990s. He cites works from the previous two decades, by Lucinda Beier, Harold Cook and Michael MacDonald, for example, only to confirm opinions drawn from a much older tradition in medical history. Thus, his account of Thomas Sydenham is based on works by J F Payne (1900) and Kenneth Dewhurst (1966), and he does not cite the more incisive analysis by Andrew Cunningham, even though he has seen the book which contains the essay. No study of

midwifery and childbirth more recent than 1982 is cited. Professor Sloan has looked at some primary printed sources, but he has not allowed them to influence his opinions. His familiarity with them can readily be judged. The leading Catholic natural philosopher, Sir Kenelm Digby, FRS, is described as a quack and writer on “pseudo-science”. James Primerose’s *Popular errors* is cited by its subtitle and the translation is ascribed not to the famous Robert Wittie but to “Wilkie”.

One struggles to find something good to say about what has clearly been a labour of love, but in vain. This book is crammed with misunderstandings and myths. Professor Sloan does not understand medical licensing, despite there being an extensive literature on the subject. He believes that Paracelsianism consisted mainly in the prescription of mercury and sulphur. His midwives are illiterate incompetents, inflicting a high perinatal mortality rate. William Harvey practised as a man-midwife. There were no attempts to supply towns with clean water.

This book cannot be recommended for any category of novice reader. The judgements and phrasing throughout are simply too modern-minded to be useful.

**David Harley, Oxford**

**Joan Lane, *John Hall and his patients: the medical practice of Shakespeare’s son-in-law*, medical commentary by Melvin Earles, Stratford-upon-Avon, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Alan Sutton, 1996, pp. lii, 378, illus., £39.95 (0-7509-1094-1).**

In Joan Lane’s new edition of John Hall’s (1575?–1635) seventeenth-century medical case notes, Stratford-upon-Avon and vicinity comes to life, not as the birthplace of Hall’s father-in-law, William Shakespeare, but as the centre of a medical practice whose theatre of operations extended above twenty miles in all directions, covering ground in Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Oxfordshire. Translated from the Latin and