

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.

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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.

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