

Book Reviews

Coleman, had trained in human surgery and made no attempts, in more than 40 years of teaching at the College, to cover subjects unconnected with horses.

It was not until, as the Royal Veterinary College, the institution entered its second century under John McFadyean in the 1890s that veterinary education in Britain achieved the same academic standards as other professions at home, and similar schools on the European continent. The story of the good times and the bad times is well told by the late Ernest Cotchin, who died before completion of the manuscript. Generous additional contributions by Sherwin Hall and Clifford Formston, and careful editing, have made the present volume the complete history which the College deserves on the occasion of its bicentenary. The serious historian may regret the absence of specific notes and references, but will have to be content with a short bibliography.

The coffee-table format accommodates many well chosen illustrations, some of them in colour. The first half of the book boasts a number eighteenth- and nineteenth-century engravings, some old favourites, others rarely seen in published form. The juxtaposition of George Stubb's "Eclipse" from life and Vial's "Geometrical Drawing representing the exact proportions of the late Famous Eclipse" is particularly apt. The book's second half benefits from the age of photography to record images of the College's more recent principals, professors, and occasionally students, at various stages in the history of its second century. Royal visits are also recorded. A fetching photograph shows a young Queen Elizabeth II chatting to an equine patient which is busily exploring the quality of her fur collar, all too obviously fashioned from what has later become known as an endangered species of Great Spotted Cats. It reminds the reader forcibly of the giant strides made since 1959 by the conservation lobby of which Prince Philip, Patron of the College, is such a prominent member. Even the Decimus Burton Arch at Hyde Park Corner is there: Adrian Jones, who sculpted the four magnificent horses above, had graduated from the College in 1866.

Lise Wilkinson, Royal Postgraduate Medical School

DAVID L. COWEN and WILLIAM H. HELFAND, *Pharmacy: an illustrated history*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1990, pp. 272, illus., £55.00 (0-8019-1498-0).

In recent years, pharmacy history, by comparison with the published output of modern medical history, has been ill-served by either general surveys or more esoteric monographs, particularly in the English language. Nor has it yet received the attention of a significant number of professional historians, a result of which is that much of what is available has been produced by pharmacists. Any new publication on the history of pharmacy, therefore, must be welcomed; but a publication of the combined authorship of two leading pharmaceutical historians is a rare and important event.

This volume falls into the category of a wide ranging survey, aimed perhaps especially at the interested pharmacist reader although it will undoubtedly appeal to a wider non-specialist audience. The authors and publishers must be congratulated for having produced an attractive publication that is greatly enhanced by many newly reproduced and unusual images of pharmacy. It is a beautifully and expensively produced volume relying heavily on Helfand's own remarkable collection of original illustrations that more than repay the extensive use of colour reproduction.

The text belongs to an established tradition of books on the history of pharmacy that stretches back to at least the 1940s with the publication of the first edition of Edward Kremer's and George Urdang's *History of Pharmacy* (1940) and Patrice Bousset's *Histoire illustrée de la pharmacie* (1949), and more recently Patrice Bousset, Henri Bonnenmain and Frank J Bové's *Histoire de la pharmacie et de l'industrie pharmaceutique* (1982). Characterized by a high proportion of illustrations, chronological structure and a plethora of chapters, sections and headings, all these works make ambitious attempts to cover pharmacy through from its ancient origins to the present, embracing a vast range of both primary and secondary sources.

Book Reviews

Cowen and Helfand's treatment is no exception and, indeed, they readily acknowledge their debt to Edward Kremer's and George Urdang's pioneering work and its revision by Glenn Sonnedecker. To this they have been worthy successors. They have incorporated much new material offered by recent authors (though with some obvious exceptions as the bibliography reveals) and have produced a sound and, for the most part, comprehensive summary of the areas of pharmacy history that have, so far, received the detailed attention of specialist historians, bringing up to date an overview of its scientific, professional and institutional evolution. Commendably, this includes not only published and manuscript material but also relies on the evidence of objects, illustrations and a variety of ephemeral literature. It does not, however, pretend to offer a significant revision of its sources or the historiographical approach of its forbears. One possibly regrettable consequence is that the coverage, in places, is cursory and inevitably emphasizes (or re-emphasizes) certain topics at the expense of others, leaving potential new territory largely undiscussed: for instance, for the British reader there is little detailed consideration of the origins and rise of the early chemist and druggist, an area recently re-assessed from a social and economic perspective by various British historians and an issue, no doubt, of relevance to the American experience on which the writers draw so heavily. This is, self-evidently, an American publication of American authorship and emphasis: while the earlier chapters retrace the history of pharmacy through the ancient, medieval and renaissance world of Western civilization it turns firmly to the New world and to the American model, making only brief mention of its European counterparts, to recount the "triumphant" progress of pharmacy in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this book will go a long way to meeting a need for an updated and comprehensive historical introduction to the science and practice of pharmacy and, in addition, offers a vivid insight into the wealth of magnificent pictorial representation that is available to illuminate this still much neglected area of historical research.

Kate Arnold-Forster, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

ANGUS McLAREN, *A history of contraception from antiquity to the present day*, Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times series, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990, pp. viii, 275, £25.00 (0-631-16711-0).

McLaren, a professor of history at the University of Victoria in Canada, has already written several scholarly monographs on the history of birth control in England, France and elsewhere. This book, a summation of his work on the subject, is considerably more ambitious, extending across all of western society and encompassing a period of three thousand years. It is the first general history of family limitation in half a century, and supersedes Norman Himes's *Medical History of Contraception* (1936). McLaren's particular virtue is the ease with which he weaves through the enormous secondary literature on contraception and abortion from the ancient Greeks to the present, while sampling the primary literature of three millennia for arresting illustrations of his larger argument.

McLaren emerges as a debunker. He is critical of historians, including the present reviewer, who portray this long span as divided by a series of watersheds. He discounts technological innovation in birth control, believing structural determinants to be more important in influencing how intensively couples attempted to curb their fertility. Note that his emphasis is on the how rather than the whether, for McLaren, on the basis of anecdotal evidence, believes that at all times and places women have tried to control their own so-called "natural" fertility. Indeed he bristles at demographers who assume that natural fertility of any kind characterized Europe before 1800, and points out that delayed marriage and prolonged lactation also constitute forms of family limitation. The book's basic argument is that birth control has always existed, merely that women in some cultures have not always employed it fully, and that what constitutes a "large" or "small" family is really "a question of perception". At times, McLaren's views approach the kind of reductionism that virtually rules out comparison.