

Book Reviews

ALFRED GRAFE, *A history of experimental virology*, transl. Elvira Rechendorf, Berlin, New York and London, Springer-Verlag, 1991, pp. xi, 343, DM 98.00 (3–540–51925–4).

This is a virologist's book more than a historian's. Perhaps a better description would be "an introductory historical text for students of virology". As such it is very thorough, very factual, and highly technical, and would be an invaluable source of reference. For the non-specialist, this makes for a hard read; on the other hand, it is a handy collection of information, clearly organized in short sections, again in the manner of textbooks or reference works, all of it accessible through a helpful index.

Two introductory chapters covering what the author calls "2000 years [which] preceded the emergence of experimental virology" are unremarkable, except perhaps for the gratuitous statement on p. 34 that "Manson had characterised the typical intracellular malaria tropica-halfmoon in 1893"—which seems to be rather a cavalier rendering of a Manson-Bahr anecdote concerning a demonstration by Manson in the wards of UCH at the end of that year.

The rest of the book is all that it claims to be: an account of the progress of experimental virology in the twentieth century. The contents, the very chapter headings even, demonstrate the way in which such progress in the latter half of the century is in danger of obscuring the delimitations between a growing number of ramifications, and of straying into other emerging new disciplines, notably immunology, development of vaccines and, above all, molecular biology and genetics. Thirty-five years ago one of the formative personalities of modern virology, Macfarlane Burnet (1899–1985), wrote a short essay with the title 'Men or molecules?'. Twenty-five years later, his French counterpart André Lwoff, happily still with us, wrote: "Today virology is in danger of losing its soul, since viruses now show a strong tendency to become sequences. . . . Moreover, and it is the direct result of an abundance of discoveries, the very concept of virus wavers on its foundations. Our problem today and in future is to keep abreast of its whereabouts". Any such more philosophical reflections by some of the most influential of twentieth-century virologists find no place in Grafe's text.

The inclusion of a glossary is helpful to the non-specialist although, at a total length of barely three pages, some inclusions and exclusions seem open to question: do we really need "acronym" explained (except perhaps to enable the compiler to explain "sigla" as "identical to acronym")? On the other hand, the definition of "allergy" as "overshouting [sic] hypersensitivity reaction" must charm any reader, and stimulate a search for a German adjective which could have given rise to this puzzling neologism.

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ANDREW WEAR (ed.), *Medicine in society: historical essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. x, 397, illus., £45.00, \$69.95 (hardback, 0–521–33351–2), £14.95, \$19.95 (paperback, 0–521–33639–2).

The aim of this collection of essays is to give the reader some of the results of the new social history of medicine. Andrew Wear of the Wellcome Institute has collected a dozen essays, almost all of them written especially for this volume, and has thereby filled one of the greatest voids in our field by providing a very useful text for teaching general courses in the history of medicine. Available immediately in both hard- and paperback, this book should find wide adoption in the increasing number of medical history courses on both sides of the Atlantic.

What is more, we finally have a book in which the period from 1870 to the present does not predominate. Half of this book of nearly 400 pages is devoted to the history of medicine prior to 1800.

The newer work in the history of medicine has paid attention to both doctors and their patients, to medical ideas and institutions, as well as to their role in western society from antiquity to the present day. The authors, for the most part, have taken sufficient space to cover broadly, to give some detail, and above all, to provide us with many references to the increasingly rich literature of the work that is now being published.