

In summary, this book as a whole is patchy in quality and content, by comparison with the standards of previous volumes issued by the Galton Institute. The several valuable chapters might have been better placed and more accessible as review papers in journals since they will not be read by many who would find them interesting. The conference organizers should perhaps have been content to have held a useful conference, or to have planned a more coherent book from the outset.

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Thomas H Weller, *Growing pathogens in tissue cultures: fifty years in academic tropical medicine, pediatrics, and virology*, Science History Publications for Boston Medical Library, 2004, pp. xi, 291 (hardback 0-88135-380-9).

Readers of this autobiography are likely to be virologists and historians of virology and biology who will already be familiar with the biomedical achievements of Thomas H Weller—and he is not a man to hide his light under the proverbial bushel. The tissue culture method developed by John F Enders, Frederick C Robbins and Weller, which was subsequently used for the propagation of polio virus, was indeed a great step forward in experimental virology; and it ultimately proved to be of decisive importance for the development, by Jonas Salk and by Albert Sabin, of polio vaccines in the 1950s.

Less well known is what Weller calls ‘My Growing Role in Academic Tropical Medicine’ (p. 181), which covers his years of teaching comparative pathology and tropical medicine in a new Department of Tropical Public Health established at the Harvard School of Public Health, where in 1954 he became Strong Professor and Chair of Tropical Medicine. Shortly afterwards Weller received, jointly with Enders and Robbins, that year’s Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their “discovery of the ability of the poliomyelitis viruses to grow in tissue cultures” (p. 91).

Leading up to the final results with polio viruses, Weller describes early work with isolation of a number of other viruses of importance by tissue culture techniques, from human tissue culture in flasks, to the roller-tube techniques eventually chosen. The viruses studied included the varicella-zoster virus, the rubella virus, and the human cytomegaloviruses and their congenital effects. Then, in 1947, Coxsackie viruses became important to Weller’s story during an outbreak in Boston of an “unusual febrile and very painful illness”. In a rare historical reference to early events, the reader is told that “The illness had been described in Iceland by Jón Finsen in 1856 under the term ‘pleurodynia’ and later acquired other descriptive names that included ‘devil’s grip’ and ‘epidemic benign dry pleurisy’ ” (p. 46). Apart from mention of Finsen’s name, references here are mostly to American names and work, with no attention paid to other early work across the Atlantic—nor even to an outbreak in the USA, in June 1888, around Charlottesville and the University of Virginia.

Those missing historical facts are listed in the classic work *Den Bornholmske Syge myalgia epidemica*, by Ejnar Sylvest, written following an outbreak of the disease in Denmark only fifteen years before the one in Boston, and published in Copenhagen in both Danish (1933) and English (1934). Weller’s section on the study concludes with a characteristic paragraph: “Looking back at our studies on epidemic pleurodynia, it is clear that if we had used suckling mice that were two days old instead of ten days old, we would have isolated the Coxsackie viruses before Dalldorf [1948], and they would now have a different name. A difference of eight days resulted in failure. Our work, however, stands as the first virologic and immunologic studies on an epidemic of pleurodynia” (p. 48). Here and elsewhere, the author is very keen on priority issues.

Not surprisingly, the work on polio viruses and the award of the 1954 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine form a central part of this autobiography. Weller’s reflections on the accompanying ceremonies in Stockholm and associated events elsewhere, and even Vatican

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meetings with the Pope, do not differ much from similar reflections by other Nobel laureates, richly illustrated as they are.

Nearly a third of the book is devoted to Weller's experiences and achievements in tropical medical research. The blurb tells us that he "organized studies of tropical diseases, and the training of physicians and other health professionals in the field of tropical diseases"—what he himself refers to as 'Developing Young Scientists'—during population-based studies of schistosomiasis and Chagas' disease. In spite of clinical descriptions of these diseases, there are again no historical references. Even in the case of *Schistosoma mansoni*, with the well-known diagram of its life-cycle, there is no mention anywhere of either Patrick Manson or Robert Leiper and their lives' work on the disease, conducted in the early decades of the twentieth century at Manson's pioneer School of Tropical Medicine in London, and in Egypt during the First World War. The only reference to the School in the book's index and text is in connection with the 'Harvard–Wellcome Brazil Project'—according to Weller a success at the Harvard end, with the establishment of a field station in Salvador, Brazil, but less so in the case of the London School. The latter partial failure may be ascribed to "local academic politics in Brazil", which had become only too evident to Weller and to the project administrator, one Dr Richard Morrow, on their first arrival there. University politics also included a language problem, manifest in anti-Pan American Health Organization attitudes, largely because senior PAHO representatives assigned there spoke only Spanish and no Portuguese—a not unusual problem in Latin-American politics.

Some readers may feel rather overwhelmed by the personal style of this book. The number of paragraphs, and even sentences, beginning with "I" almost defy counting—but then this is after all an autobiography, and the author has been involved in a wide variety of important biomedical experiments that deserve recognition over a long lifetime. His reminiscences should provide inspiration for

coming generations in clinical and experimental medicine.

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Willem de Blécourt and Cornelia Usborne (eds), *Cultural approaches to the history of medicine: mediating medicine in early modern and modern Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. xxiii, 241, £50.00 (hardback 1-4039-1569-5).

Moving away from outmoded theories of "medical imperialism", this collection seeks to reconstruct the "complex web of communications and re-configurations" in medical history. Addressing issues as diverse as heart dissection, masturbation, animal care, hermaphroditism and orthopaedics, in Europe between the 1600s and the present, it uses the concept and role of "mediation" to explore theories of sickness and healing. As identified by Roy Porter's foreword, the contributors seek to isolate the meanings of medical knowledge and expectations, rather than relying on filter-down or Foucauldian approaches to the development of modern medicine. Each of the essays claims to offer images of medical knowledge and practice that are more "rich", "complex" or "comprehensive" than those currently in vogue. The eclectic range of subjects studied is promising, though its successes are mixed.

Several contributors focus on "mediation" in terms of the construction and circulation of medical knowledge between texts and audiences, and between patients, practitioners and the wider community. Thus Louise Hill Curth draws parallels between human and animal medical theory and treatment to demonstrate the importance of "one medicine" in the humoral tradition. Micheline Louis-Courvoisier and Sèverine Pilloud, and Michael Stolberg use the extensive archival resources of the Genevan doctor Samuel Auguste Tissot. The former contributors focus on the formal and contextual composition of the letters and examine the social embeddedness of healing concepts. Michael