

Book Reviews

PETER RAZZELL, *Edward Jenner's cowpox vaccine: the history of a medical myth*, Lewes, Sussex, Caliban Books, 1977, pp. 130, £10.00.

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More than ten years ago, Dr. Razzell published a short article with the same subtitle. Here now is a slender book to follow up the case. The repeated application of the alliterative catch-phrase "medical myth" to Jenner and his work leaves the suspicion of a nagging doubt in the mind of the reader when he encounters the author's protestations that he has "attempted" to avoid a polemical tone.

However, in the first four-fifths of the book Dr. Razzell has examined the early literature in English, and presented us with an exhaustive collection of quotes which show that much of the published so-called evidence is less than reliable. As Dr. Razzell points out, there can be little doubt that the unfortunate episode at the London Smallpox Hospital in 1799 left Jenner and Woodville and other followers using a vaccine which was certainly not pure cowpox lymph. Dr. Razzell would like to prove to us that what Jenner eventually used was an attenuated strain of smallpox virus, and he goes to considerable trouble, including an excursion into the wider reaches of speculative virology, in order to support his thesis. Unfortunately he is on shaky ground here, and his selective treatment of the literature is less than convincing (especially when he presents us with untranslated French nomenclature, including the original *accents aigus*, and unfortunately also the original misprints).

In his efforts to prove the feasibility of attenuation of smallpox virus without cowpox hybridization, he quotes Gatti, the great eighteenth-century inoculator. But instead of using Gatti's own French text, Dr. Razzell quotes from an English translation by Maty, who in his foreword confessed to having "followed his own taste" in re-arranging the text, and to adding here and there from a previous publication of Gatti's, and even inserting comment of his own. Unfortunately the footnote quoted by Dr. Razzell belongs to the part where Maty has allowed himself to take liberties with the text, weaving in remarks on attenuation found only in the previous volume, and not in the context of this footnote. Where Gatti *did* write on attenuation, he concluded with a heartfelt cry: ". . . I am convinced that if it were possible to attenuate the variolous matter no further improvements would be required in the art of inoculation, but I know of no way of achieving such attenuation".

The final impression of the book must be that it has established with certainty little that we did not know already. It does however serve to remind us that social historians perhaps do not judge scientific contributions of the past by the same standards as those applied by scientists contemplating early contributions to their own subjects. Within the great web of the history of ideas, it matters little whether Jenner vaccinated in later years with cowpox, attenuated smallpox, or, as seems most likely, with a vaccinia hybrid resulting from mixed infection with cowpox and smallpox in the early days in the London Smallpox Hospital, when Baron tells us they became "commingled". When all is said and done, Jenner showed for the first time that it was possible to use a related, mild infection to immunize against a different, severe one. He introduced an enormously important principle. Jenner may not have been

Book Reviews

an intellectual giant; quite possibly he was not. It does not alter the fact that several very astute successors have been standing on his shoulders, including Pasteur who in 1881, at the height of his career, had no qualms at all about acknowledging his debt to Jenner.

Paradoxically the present volume leaves a reader who had no illusions about Jenner—as nobody who has read for example Dixon's balanced account in *Smallpox* need have—with a desire to defend him. But at the somewhat surprising price of £10 for little more than 100 paper-bound pages with no illustrations (by way of comparison, Beveridge's lively and informative 124 pages on influenza including more than a dozen illustrations, which has appeared almost simultaneously, is available for a mere £2.95) the book is perhaps not likely to influence a wide readership.

CHARLES E. ROSENBERG (editor), *The family in history*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. vii, 208, \$10.00.

The six essays published here were presented to the first Stephen Allen Kaplan Memorial Symposium in social history. They illuminate an area of study which is growing rapidly, and although unequal in quality they add to the increasing accumulation of scholarship on an important, but so far neglected, topic. Articles on the upper-class family in China prior to the nineteenth century and on 'Domestic ideas and social behaviour: evidence from medieval Genoa' are of particular value for they discuss little-known subjects and are based on materials not previously widely available. The final piece is on 'Dr. Spock: the confidence man' and it analyses the writings of a man responsible and influenced by a changing pattern of child-rearing in twentieth-century America.

The essays are well written, with full documentation, but the typographical errors are too frequent and the italic type too faint.

ROBERT FORSTER and OREST RANUM (editors), *Family and society. Selections from the "Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations"*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. x, 261, £2.75 (paperback).

The editors present the second volume of translations from the prestigious and innovative historical periodical, the *Annales*. All but one of the eleven papers in this volume are from a single issue published in 1972. The family as a means of protecting lineage and family holdings is the main theme. Customs of rearing children, dowries and marriage practices, the life of the peasant as contrasted with that of the gentry, inheritance laws, pregnancies, illegitimate births, fertility and industrialization are also discussed with evidence being produced from a wealth of relevant documents. Most essays deal with France, but similar studies could, no doubt, be carried out in other countries where adequate primary sources are available. The *Annales* aims at an interdisciplinary and holistic reconstruction of the past, or total history, and the present selection of its offerings is as welcome as its predecessor. It is to be hoped that it will stimulate others to adopt this praiseworthy and rewarding technique.