

## Book Reviews

illuminating account of the “generational family” prevalent in Middle European peasant society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which – unlike England – households typically comprised three generations living together, often under the same roof. The authors carefully distinguish this generational family from the largely mythological “stem family”, and show its rootedness in the largely subsistence peasant economy. It is an intriguing thought that this congested familial intimacy characterized the society out of which Freud’s insights sprang!

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TODD L. SAVITT, *Medicine and slavery. The health care of blacks in antebellum Virginia*, Urbana, Chicago, and London, University of Illinois Press, 1981 (first published 1978), 8vo, pp. [xiv], 332, £4.50 (paperback).

For anyone who is interested in slavery, the medical aspects of paternalism and exploitation, the American South, and the practice of medicine in the early nineteenth century, this book is a bargain. For generations, the men who have written about the old South have been content to accept or refute contemporary assertions about the medical characteristics of slaves, and some of the most confident generalizations have rested upon fragile or distorted evidence. Here at last is a book which presents the facts and interprets the evidence in the light of modern medical knowledge. It could be objected that the history of one state is not that of a large and diverse region, but there is a solidity and consistency about the Virginian evidence, as presented by Mr. Savitt, that makes one believe that its conclusions can be applied more widely. One query is worth making. Examples are selected from almost a century and a half; is there sufficient attention to the changes in medical practice and theory? But one should not press complaints about a work which must be recognized as authoritative and may well win a place as a classic of medical history. Nor is its usefulness limited to the study of slavery. Observations and advice were usually based upon the assumption that blacks were medically different from whites, and these differences were important for defenders of slavery; but everywhere they shared the ills and health hazards of the labouring poor. “Physicians and slaveowners were correct in stating that blacks were medically different from whites, but this was only true for certain specific diseases and conditions. For the most part, the illnesses and treatments of blacks were identical with those of whites.”

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