

Book Reviews

RUTH LEYS, *From sympathy to reflex: Marshall Hall and his opponents*, repr. with a new preface of 'Alison versus Hall: aspects of the formation and reception of the reflex concept in Britain', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1976, New York and London, Garland, 1990, pp. 549, \$100.00 (0-8240-0042-0).

Leys is right in lamenting the dearth of research on the history of neurophysiology in early nineteenth-century Britain and this publication—a xeroxcopy of her 1976 Ph.D. thesis with a brief additional Preface but also with a change of title—represents a useful contribution to the literature. It is a pity that the original and more appropriate title—*Alison versus Hall: aspects of the formation and reception of the reflex concept in Britain*—has not been retained since the interesting figure of W. P. Alison, whom she has been at pains to retrieve from relative obscurity and who rather than Marshall Hall is her leading man in this work, is not readily suggested by the new title.

Although Leys makes reference to the controversies associated with Hall's concept of reflex action, she does not analyse the highly significant in-fighting and debate within the Royal Society, the institution above all others in which Hall sought acceptance and success. Furthermore, whilst Hall was active in the early days of the British Medical Association, he was never aggressively political, being more concerned with promoting and preserving his own scientific reputation.

Despite Hall's sometimes exaggerated opinion of the value of his own work on neuroscience, even he never, as this book does, claimed to have discovered reflex action. Hall was well aware of the relevant work of predecessors and saw his major contribution as one of linking, within a common framework, a range of hitherto disparate physiological phenomena recognisable today as reflex actions. As Leys makes clear, he presented a mechanistic explanatory model which, contrary to the prevailing view, excluded the soul and even more importantly excluded sensation as a necessary concomitant.

The work shows a pleasing familiarity with much of the relevant literature, and will be a valuable resource for other researchers in the field.

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ROY PORTER, *Doctor of society: Thomas Beddoes and the sick trade in late-Enlightenment England*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. x, 238, £40.00 (0-415-04850-8)

In his recent trilogy on the "long eighteenth century", Roy Porter portrayed, with apparent enthusiasm, a medical market-place in which the consumer could choose between a variety of practitioners, all equally entrepreneurial, bolstered by a shared knowledge of medicine that spanned the boundaries of lay and professional, elite and popular. Such a picture, painted with Porter's perennial panache, could appeal to a range of contemporary interests, ranging from anti-professional groups to advocates of a customer-led reform of the National Health Service. Porter himself has always urged caution about such uses of medical history: the doctors and patients of that consumer society were largely helpless in the face of disease and there was much to criticize in Georgian medicine. Yet, in the necessary task of rescuing that period from caricatures of corruption and intellectual torpor, the emphasis was generally positive. Now, through the medium of Thomas Beddoes, Porter has brought his reservations centre stage. Since Beddoes and his Bristol milieu have been thoroughly described recently by Dorothy Stansfield, Trevor Levere, Michael Neve and Mary Fissell, the author feels free to concentrate on Beddoes' analysis of the doctor's dilemma in consumer society. He offers us a passionate critique of medicine around 1800 and, surely, thereafter. For once the questions in the publisher's blurb: "why is modern society so sick?" and "should doctors be involved in politics?", seem in reasonable accord with the author's intentions.

Porter sees Beddoes' England facing a crisis of modernity, a modernity that was generating a whole new range of sicknesses, many of them iatrogenic (hence the 'sick trade' of the sub-title). Through Beddoes, he describes the paradoxes facing any doctor seeking to put medicine to the