

Book Reviews

these initiatives. Girls were taught gymnastics and dance to improve their body tone and attractiveness, but were not encouraged to participate in competitive or team sports, which might make them less fertile and more masculine. Similarly, scientists who studied work conditions in factories focused on women's role as mothers. Arguments for shorter hours and better work conditions for women were made on the grounds of their responsibilities to their children. The war and the depression meant that these arguments for reform were mostly ignored.

Ultimately, Stewart posits the dominance of pronatalist discourse in a country where fear of depopulation and degeneration equated femininity with reproduction. Yet, she also shows that this pronatalist discourse failed. Because doctors and hygienists were unwilling to provide candid sex advice and continued to emphasize the pains of labour, women did not have more babies. Disciplining women through education and fear did not work, but appealing to their vanity did improve hygiene. Stewart's conclusions are thought-provoking and the range of her research impressive. It is disappointing that to get to her main points you have to wade through pages of disconnected (and often contradictory) evidence with very little analysis or synthesis.

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Alan H Sykes, *Sharpey's fibres: the life of William Sharpey, the father of modern physiology in England*, York, William Sessions, 2001, pp. xii, 164, illus., £18.50 (paperback 1-85072-270-6).

William Sharpey received the sobriquet of "father of modern physiology" in Britain

from his former pupil, Edward Schafer. Sharpey's own research output was, however, remarkably slight. He exerted his influence upon medical science chiefly as a teacher and mentor of men who did go on to make fundamental institutional and intellectual contributions to the field. Apart from Schafer, who became Professor of Physiology in Edinburgh, the most prominent of these was Michael Foster, founder of the Cambridge school of physiology.

This is the first book-length study of Sharpey's life, career and influence, although D W Taylor did publish two lengthy articles on the subject in 1971. Much of the material in the volume is familiar. But Sykes has done a commendable job of gathering together the available information on Sharpey and his associates; in the process he has uncovered a few additional sources. These include Foster's fascinating account of a trip to Germany that he and Sharpey undertook in 1870.

Although Sykes' factual grasp of Sharpey's career is strong, his interpretation of the medical politics of the period tends to be superficial. His account of the controversy surrounding Sharpey's move to London in 1836 would have benefited from reference to the work of Adrian Desmond and Pauline Mazumdar. Tantalizing questions are raised but not answered: *why*, for instance, was Henry Warburton so implacably opposed to Sharpey's appointment to the London University?

Sykes writes with an obvious affection and respect for his subject. The result of this enthusiasm is a very readable and well-illustrated book. One quibble is that the lack of footnotes makes it difficult for other scholars to follow up some of the references that he provides.

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