

## Book Reviews

other persons who are mentioned because at some time something has been named after them. Historians may hope that future editions will not prune too much on the ground of obsolescence.

Manifestly there is no outright “best buy”: Firkin & Whitworth contain material not to be found elsewhere, and similarly much that they do not cover is available elsewhere. All depends on what you seek. They can correct in their next edition one trap for the seeker: an unfamiliar anomaly has consigned all the names starting with Mac or its variants to the end of all others starting with M, as if Mac were the next letter of the alphabet. Thus six people of Scots origin have been consigned to inaccessibility, unless by the index—but there is no index! The presence of this anomaly has in no way biased the present review.

**John M Forrester, Edinburgh**

**A W Sloan, *English medicine in the seventeenth century*, Bishop Auckland, Durham Academic Press, 1996, pp. x, 215, illus., £12.00 (1-900838-00-1).**

Since the publication of Charles Webster’s *The great instauration* some twenty years ago, there has been a considerable amount of scholarly attention focused on medicine in seventeenth-century England. There is therefore a need for a new work of synthesis which would introduce the historiography to students and general readers. This book is not it.

Professor Sloan is a retired physiologist with an interest in history, but he appears to have read nothing published in the 1990s. He cites works from the previous two decades, by Lucinda Beier, Harold Cook and Michael MacDonald, for example, only to confirm opinions drawn from a much older tradition in medical history. Thus, his account of Thomas Sydenham is based on works by J F Payne (1900) and Kenneth Dewhurst (1966), and he does not cite the more incisive analysis by Andrew Cunningham, even though he has seen the book which contains the essay. No study of

midwifery and childbirth more recent than 1982 is cited. Professor Sloan has looked at some primary printed sources, but he has not allowed them to influence his opinions. His familiarity with them can readily be judged. The leading Catholic natural philosopher, Sir Kenelm Digby, FRS, is described as a quack and writer on “pseudo-science”. James Primerose’s *Popular errors* is cited by its subtitle and the translation is ascribed not to the famous Robert Wittie but to “Wilkie”.

One struggles to find something good to say about what has clearly been a labour of love, but in vain. This book is crammed with misunderstandings and myths. Professor Sloan does not understand medical licensing, despite there being an extensive literature on the subject. He believes that Paracelsianism consisted mainly in the prescription of mercury and sulphur. His midwives are illiterate incompetents, inflicting a high perinatal mortality rate. William Harvey practised as a man-midwife. There were no attempts to supply towns with clean water.

This book cannot be recommended for any category of novice reader. The judgements and phrasing throughout are simply too modern-minded to be useful.

**David Harley, Oxford**

**Joan Lane, *John Hall and his patients: the medical practice of Shakespeare’s son-in-law*, medical commentary by Melvin Earles, Stratford-upon-Avon, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Alan Sutton, 1996, pp. lii, 378, illus., £39.95 (0-7509-1094-1).**

In Joan Lane’s new edition of John Hall’s (1575?–1635) seventeenth-century medical case notes, Stratford-upon-Avon and vicinity comes to life, not as the birthplace of Hall’s father-in-law, William Shakespeare, but as the centre of a medical practice whose theatre of operations extended above twenty miles in all directions, covering ground in Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Oxfordshire. Translated from the Latin and

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first published in 1657 by James Cooke (other editions in 1679 and 1683) under the title *Select observations on English bodies of eminent persons in desperate diseases*, Hall's posthumous casebook gives a rare glimpse into the social interrelations that helped constitute a country doctor's clientele. But more important, it provides a feel for the day-to-day practice of seventeenth-century humoral medicine.

Lane's identification of most of Hall's patients reveals the interlocking social and blood relations that knitted Hall's practice together. From these selective notes, which cover the years 1611–35, we learn that Hall's clients were primarily female gentry, although he counted among his patients numerous male aristocrats with extensive households, including Lord Northampton, Sir Thomas Puckering, and Baron Compton. His most famous patient, barring his wife Susanna (who was Shakespeare's eldest daughter), was the poet Michael Drayton, who required medical services when he was visiting the home of his patron and one of Hall's patients, Lady Anne Rainsford. Hall thus came upon Drayton in the way in which he came upon many of his patients—through their blood, marital, service, or neighbourly connections to established families of the aristocracy or gentry for whom he already provided medical services. When Hall treated lower-class patients they tended to be retainers of such households. Puritan in his sympathies, Hall did not discriminate on religious grounds, many of his patients being members of prominent Catholic families.

Hall's medical protocols of purging, humoral alteration, restoration, and sparing venesection are accompanied here by Melvin Earles's invaluable medical commentary and pharmaceutical glosses. Except in pregnant women, Hall usually started treatment with purging. The sheer number of medicaments, let alone their far-flung provenance, is at times dazzling, including Asiatic musk, rubies and emeralds, spider-webs and earthworms, sealed earth or clays from Armenia, East Indian resins, hartshorn, ambergris, frog-spawn, Celtic spikenard, and scorpion oil. But the dazzle wears off as these unfamiliar drugs are

prescribed repeatedly by Hall in accordance with particular medical regimens: hartshorn for fever, precious stones as cordials, sealed earth for leucorrhoea, frog-spawn for burns, and scurvy grass for scurvy.

Given the thoroughness of this edition, one cannot but help but wonder why the book's first editor, James Cooke, is only cursorily mentioned, for it is to Cooke that we must look for explanations as to why Hall's work was first published. As Lane reports, Cooke himself claimed merely that Hall meant for his notes to be published posthumously. However, Cooke published the work during a period of growth in vernacular medical publishing which Charles Webster attributes to reformers who were intent on spreading medical knowledge among those who could not afford medical services. We catch a glimpse of this reforming impulse in Cooke's preface to the second edition (included here) where he describes himself as a pharmaceutical advisor to Lord Brook and informs us that Brook charged him to offer the medical advice of Brook's own physicians to the Lord's sick neighbours. Cooke hopes that in publishing these prescriptions he is serving the public while doing "no wrong" to these well-paid physicians. In the spirit of the tradition of great households offering medical assistance to their poorer neighbours, Cooke offers up a literary analogue by translating and publishing the Latin prescriptions of the physicians of eminent persons for the benefit of the less fortunate. Except for this lack of attention to Cooke, Lane's edition of Hall's casebook is a fine addition to the libraries of historians of early modern medical practice.

**Julie Robin Solomon**, American University

**Stanton J Linden**, *Darke hieroglyphicks: alchemy in English literature from Chaucer to the Restoration*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996, pp. ix, 373, illus., \$45.00 (0-8131-1968-5).

The period between the late fourteenth and late seventeenth centuries marked the height of