

Book Reviews

OWSEI TEMKIN, *Galenism. Rise and decline of a medical philosophy*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1973, pp. xvii, 240, illus., \$15.00.

Owsei Temkin is the most outstanding historian of medicine alive today, and it is possible that we shall never again see in this discipline a scholar of his brilliance and versatility. Since his first paper of 1927 he has written on a great variety of subjects, ranging from Ancient Egypt to nineteenth-century physiology, each publication being a model of impeccable scholarship. Despite his catholic tastes in the historical and philosophical aspects of medicine, Temkin has always been greatly attracted to the medicine of Classical Antiquity, the topic to which he contributed so significantly in his first few years as a medical historian.

It is therefore wholly appropriate that, when invited to give the four Messenger Lectures at Cornell University in the autumn of 1970, he should select for his title, "Galenism. Rise and fall of a medical philosophy". Their publication now is an important event in the history of medicine, for this book not only presents a superb account of the most influential medical system in history, but it is also a model of how historical material should be presented. It does this at two levels: one for the transient student and one for the committed scholar. The text, with some modifications, is as presented to those with little background in medical history; it can, nevertheless, be read with advantage by the professional. The extensive footnotes amplify and document the text for the scholar, and they demonstrate how the skilled writer can weave an orchestral pattern with the main theme stated in the text, supported by subtle elaborations at the foot of the page. Professor Temkin is a master of this art.

The content of the book deserves no less praise. First, the ideal model of medicine that Galen sought without success, but with achievements worthy of the greatest praise when viewed in the light of his times, is discussed. As a medical philosophy it was to influence the West for centuries and the way in which it grew during and after his day is traced with the liberal use of Greek, Latin and Arabic sources. Its dominance throughout the Middle Ages and then the challenge of the Renaissance are described, and the final chapter, "Fall and after life" shows how, after being destroyed as a scientific philosophy in the seventeenth century, it lingered on until at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was displaced by our medicine. "By 1870 medicine was firmly launched on its new scientific course, which gave it the intellectual unity it had lost after the downfall of Galenism as a medical philosophy. . ." (p. 191). The technique of drawing comparisons between deposed and present-day ideas is most useful for the modern student. In addition to the 545 footnotes, there is an extensive bibliography, and excellent index.

As the author admits, it would be impossible to deal with the whole story of Galenism. Hopefully, others stimulated and inspired by Temkin's contributions will add to the account. Even if they do so, it is very unlikely that they will equal this remarkable work. It should be in every library with interest in the history of medicine and, it should be read by teacher and student alike, both for its content and also as a model of historiography we could do well to emulate. To increase its availability, it is to be hoped that a cheaper version will eventually be made available.