

## Book Reviews

MARY P. ENGLISH, *Victorian values: the life and times of Dr. Edwin Lankester, M.D., F.R.S.*, Bristol, Biopress Ltd (The Orchard, Clange Road, Bristol BS3 2JX, Avon), 1990, pp. xvi, 187, illus., £29.50 (0-948737-14-X).

Edwin Lankester was born into a lower middle-class family in Suffolk in 1814 and died of the complications of diabetes in London in 1874. As a young man, he embarked on a medical career by apprenticeship, and later studied at the newly-established University College in London. By the time of his death, he had achieved a position of some standing in the medical and scientific world of that city, had a large family, was overworked, apparently prosperous, and bankrupt. He had little private practice, and his career was one long struggle to obtain enough paid employment to support his family. He taught, he wrote books, he was variously and in combination a dispensary physician, a superintendent at the South Kensington Museum, a Medical Officer of Health and a coroner. He was interested in natural history, in popular education and in sanitary improvement; he dabbled, at one time, in medical politics. In all these respects, Lankester was a typical mid-Victorian medical man. As this thorough and informative biography shows, his story amply illustrates the difficulties and anxieties of metropolitan medical practice as described in Jeanne Peterson's classic *Medical profession in mid-Victorian London*.

It was Lankester's coronership that gave his career distinction. Although he was an articulate and energetic Medical Officer, there were many such, and public health work was poorly rated by contemporaries. Following in Wakley's footsteps, however, he was a pugnacious and innovative medical coroner, at a time when collective professional ambition made this an arena of acute interest to his medical colleagues. His vision of a coroner's duties extended far beyond criminal investigations, to the prevention of infectious disease and of causes of death in prisons, lunatic asylums and workhouses. He was concerned to establish proper post-mortem procedures (including forensic laboratories, mortuaries and the appointment of experienced pathologists), and the registration of still births; he was interested in regulating the franchise for the election of coroners, and for the selection of coroners' juries; he tried to obtain retirement pensions for coroners. Lankester's coronership broke him financially, but his attempts to reform the institution, and to professionalize the medical aspects of the administration of justice, were recognized by his contemporaries as his outstanding contribution to the Victorian medical world.

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JAMES H. CASSEDDY, *Medicine in America: a short history*, The American Movement series, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. xi, 187, £26.00 (hardback, 0-8018-4207-7), £8.50 (paperback, 0-8018-4208-5).

Short histories of large subjects inevitably run risks of omission and imbalance in the treatment of their chosen area. To cover the history of medicine in America from the earliest European settlements to the present day in 159 pages seems a risky enough undertaking, yet James Cassedy here carries it off admirably. There is as yet no definitive general study of American medical history, as Cassedy observes, but his book furnishes a most serviceable short introduction to the subject. It is clearly written; its generalizations are firmly stated; and its scope is broad. It covers not simply the development of scientific medicine, but also the traditions of alternative medicine, the social and economic environment, public health and government action.

The book is arranged chronologically. There are four chapters, an epilogue and a useful bibliographical essay. Chapter 1 deals with medicine in colonial America, and is the least successful contribution, perhaps because Cassedy's real interest lies in later periods. At all events, this chapter is marred by some historically insensitive comparative observations on the differing medical input of France, Spain and England to their respective colonies, and by some overly-modern political phraseology. The remaining chapters avoid such solecisms. Although long, they are broken up into handy sections, and are easily digested. Cassedy weaves his