

### Book Reviews

MORRIS BERMAN, *Social change and scientific organization. The Royal Institution 1799–1844*, London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1978, 8vo, pp. xxv, 224, illus., £11.00.

*Reviewed by Christopher Lawrence, M.B., Ch.B., M.Sc., Medical Historian to the Wellcome Museum at the Science Museum, London SW7 2DD.*

Morris Berman has written an important book. Instead of writing the history of an institution to show how it promoted the growth of science, he has attempted to discover what *sort* of science an institution enshrined and what social interests this science furthered. The Royal Institution and the turn of the eighteenth/nineteenth century were an appropriate choice, since science and society were both in the process of major transition. Berman has successfully linked the two together.

The Royal Institution served as the focus of two major ideological changes. Berman suggests that at its founding in 1799 science was seen by the patrons as a means of controlling social unrest. The poor were to be relieved by “spreading practical scientific knowledge and introducing practical scientific improvements” (p. 11). In this context Berman gives Rumford’s reputation as philanthropist and founder a severe bruising. After its founding the Royal Institution soon shifted its gears and became the citadel of the agricultural improvers. Here the young Davy proved an ideal choice as lecturer. Because he was young and thus malleable, his interests were easily displaced from electricity to agriculture and tanning. By the mid 1820s the Royal Institution had changed direction again when the landed aristocracy were replaced by the nascent professional middle class and science had become the tool for the construction of an ordered society. In this period public health, street lighting, and mining disasters figured large in the Institution’s programme.

Berman’s case is a wholly convincing one. Yet his portraits of the almost tragic figure of Davy and the mystic Faraday seem unwittingly to suggest that, unmolested, they might have produced a science untainted by social interests: an inference, I think, judging by his polemical preface, Berman would not wish the reader to make. Berman also argues that the improved status of the medical profession after 1815 “could only be justified in terms of the mastery of scientific theory—even when that theory actually had very little to contribute to medical practice” (p. 103). But this can only be part of the answer, for what is interesting about the British medical profession in this period is how strongly resistant it was to the very sophisticated experimental physiology of the continent. British medicine remained to a great extent practical. What is most rewarding about Berman’s book is that, using a vast amount of detailed empirical material covering a limited area, he has been able to sustain some very general arguments. Equally refreshing, however, is that though thoroughly scholarly in its approach it remains highly readable and unpedantic.

FRANK McDOWELL (editor), *The source book of plastic surgery*, Baltimore, Md., Williams & Wilkins, 1977, 8vo, pp. xiv, 509, illus., \$54.00.

Many of the articles in this anthology have appeared in *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, and they are grouped under the following headings: origins of free skin grafting; origins of rhinoplasty; origins of cleft lip repairs; origins of cleft palate