

Book Reviews

PIETRO CORSI, *Oltre il mito: Lamarck e le scienze naturali del suo tempo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983, 8vo, pp. 432, L.30,000 (paperback).

While Charles Darwin still awaits a satisfactory scientific biography, four studies have appeared recently which illuminate the position of Lamarck in the history of science. While two of them, by R. Burckhardt and L. Jordanova, come from the Anglo-Saxon world, the other two come from Italy: Corsi's work has a predecessor in a monograph by Giulio Barsanti entitled *Dalla storia naturale alla storia della natura*. Italian history of science is, with a few notable exceptions, written by historians with a philosophical background, and Lamarck has always been more approachable from that standpoint than Darwin, which perhaps helps to explain the vitality of Lamarckian studies in Italy.

Corsi's important purpose is to outline Lamarck's contribution to natural science *in its scientific context*. He approaches Lamarck not as an isolated thinker but as an outstandingly important episode in a flow which he rightly depicts as much wider and more varied than we usually think. Lamarck's work is seen as closely related to, on the one hand, that of the followers of Buffon, especially Jean-Claude de la Méthérie, and, on the other, to the views later expressed by E. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Further, Lamarck's work on transmutation is seen as inextricably connected with his early work in geology, chemistry, and physics. Corsi depicts with clarity the connexions between the organic and inorganic foci of Lamarck's research.

In some respects, those parts of the book dealing with natural science in Lamarck's time are even more interesting than those treating Lamarck himself, and it is perhaps a pity that the book could not have covered that field even more thoroughly. For, reading this book, one feels that there are very few historians of science whose mastery of a whole period is as evident as that of Corsi. The only weakness in the work, occasioned by its concentration on the figure of Lamarck, is that it does not give sufficient prominence to his great contemporary, Georges Cuvier. Cuvier may have been unpleasantly preoccupied with the politics of the French academic world, but his influence on all major aspects of nineteenth-century life sciences was as great as that of anyone, including giants like von Baer and, later, Charles Darwin.

In short, this is an excellent book, which places Corsi in the front rank alongside Giuliano Pancaldi, Giulio Barsanti, Antonello La Vergata, and other young Italian authors. It seems that English-speakers have to choose between learning Italian and expediting translations of their works.

Mario A. di Gregorio
Darwin College, Cambridge

URS BOSCHUNG, (editor), *Johannes Gessners Pariser Tagebuch 1727*, Berne, Hans Huber, 1985, 8vo, pp. 420, illus., S.Fr.62.00.

In the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, Paris was a medical Mecca. Students of medicine from all over northern Europe flocked to the French capital to gain the practical experience in anatomy, surgery, and obstetrics that their native faculties of medicine did not provide. It was not that the best faculties in Europe, such as Leiden, did not offer courses in these subjects, because they did. It was rather that no faculty had the facilities to allow students to perform dissections and practise surgical operations themselves. At Paris, however, such facilities existed, for independently of the faculty a number of physicians and surgeons undertook for a fee to initiate students in the mysteries of preparing an anatomical specimen, performing surgical operations, or attending a labour. Necessarily, such individuals tended to be medical men attached to the Jardin du Roi or the city's hospitals, who thus had access to a suitable locale and a ready supply of bodies. One foreign student who came to Paris in this period was the Swiss Johannes Gessner (1709–90), in later life the leading natural scientist in his home town of Zurich. Gessner was urged to finish his medical education in the French capital by no less a person than Boerhaave, and in the winter of 1727–8 became a private pupil of the surgeon Henri Le Dran (1686–1770), a renowned lithotomist attached to the hospital of La Charité. Gessner took his training under Le Dran very seriously and kept a careful record of his daily

activities as an intern. It is this journal that has now been published, edited, and translated (it was written in Latin) for the first time.

There can be no doubt that Boschung's edition will be of great value to historians of eighteenth-century medicine. Gessner passed through Paris in the same year as his more famous friend and countryman, Albrecht von Haller. The latter, too, kept a journal of his visit to the French capital, but Gessner's account is far more informative. Haller's journal, long since published, was a cultivated man's diary; Gessner's, in contrast, was not a diary but a medical man's *aide-mémoire*. It is both one-dimensional and prosaic but as a result provides a highly interesting and unforgettable account of practical medical tuition. Admittedly, the reader learns little in Gessner's journal that substantially alters the picture given by Haller (or indeed in other journals), but it adds flesh to what was only a skeletal framework and brings the early-eighteenth-century Parisian medical world to life. His description of Le Dran's lithotomies are as graphic as a Hogarth print. Moreover, Professor Boschung has prefaced the text with a lengthy and highly erudite analysis that examines practical medical tuition in early-eighteenth-century Paris *tout court*. This publication is much more, therefore, than a useful research tool. It contains the fullest account to date of the facilities to be found at Paris and helps to explain why so many foreign students were drawn there. In consequence, this book is a vital supplement to the early chapters of Toby Gelfand's, *Professionalizing modern medicine. Paris surgeons and medical science and institutions in the eighteenth century* (Westport, Conn., 1980). Finally, it must be said that the book is beautifully produced. It is a collector's item, not just a work of scholarship.

Laurence Brockliss
Magdalen College, Oxford

ALLAN M. BRANDT, *No magic bullet. A social history of venereal disease in the United States since 1880*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. viii, 130, \$19.95.

Syphilis has been used as an indicator of moral stature, civic virtue, and patriotism. Largely unmentioned upon in mainstream medicine, not to mention polite society, American attitudes changed rapidly at the beginning of the Progressive Era. Focusing on the problem of how to balance the tradition of sexual libertinage among the armed forces with the apparently increased incidence of debilitating venereal disease, the first targets were red-light districts associated with army camps. These concerns grew to the point where at the beginning of the twentieth century the Commission on Training Camp Activities was the largest social programme in the United States.

Reformist zeal peaked during the First World War, followed by a period of embarrassed silence between the wars. Despite the availability of an effective treatment with Salvarsan, the rate of syphilis was still high when recruiting for the Second World War began. This time, sex education was paired with freely distributed contraceptives and a policy of separating troops from prostitutes by enforcing "off limits" areas. The French command thought this a particularly strange policy, especially as they encouraged established bordellos as a service to their soldiers, and to "protect local girls".

Such an attitude contrasted with the interwar goal of devising a science of "moral engineering" around venereal disease control. Such thinking was reinforced by analogies from medical science, the most powerful of which, for the purpose of reforming zeal, was the notion that prostitution is the intermediary host or carrier for the *spirochaeta pallida*, as the mosquito is host for the malarial parasite (p. 72). With the advent of far more effective treatments by penicillin, the rate of syphilis dropped dramatically, but was rapidly replaced by other diseases, in particular the ever-present gonorrhoea, but also the newer problem of herpes. Even AIDS gets a mention.

Brandt does an excellent job of tracing changing public attitudes and activities of reformers. Drawing largely on the organized campaigns surrounding the military, he extends his analysis to show why venereal diseases were so useful to different groups of moral and political reformers,