

Book Reviews

extent growth was predicated by public demand, the growth of medical knowledge, and changes in education; to what extent nursing was affected by two world wars; and then by opportunities for women elsewhere. What is needed is a pulling-together of the best of the micro-histories and an up-dating of Professor Abel Smith's work.

It is hoped that at reprinting an opportunity will be taken to correct the numerous errors of spelling and proof-reading.

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F. B. SMITH, *Florence Nightingale. Reputation and power*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, 8vo, pp. 216, £12.95.

Professor Smith wastes no time in making his opinion of the subject of this revisionist study clear. "Florence Nightingale's first chance", begins the first sentence of the book's first chapter, "to employ her talent for manipulation came in August, 1853". This is just the beginning. Much of the book is structured around Smith's desire to show that Nightingale was a liar, a careerist, a bully, a callous manipulator of friends, and a barracuda-like enemy; she was, in short, a power-hungry psychopath. She was never much of an administrator, Smith argues, and even less an original thinker. "In this study", he concludes, "I have tried to construe that species of fallacy . . . that doers of good deeds must necessarily be good in themselves". (p. 202). This flat truism serves quite literally as the book's substantive thesis. And I must confess that Smith's lively and even fascinating demolition of Miss Nightingale's moral credentials convinces this reader at least; she may well deserve this portrait in psychopathology.

It is not clear, however, that social and medical historians are deserving of quite the same product. For Professor Smith has done a careful job of research, writes lucidly, is learned and sophisticated; in every chapter (on the Crimea, on India, on nursing, and on sanitary reform in the army) he provides new material – and implies an ability to tell us much more, if he had not been obsessed by dislike for his subject. He knows the secondary literature and the relevant manuscripts, but uses them in large measure to address the question of Nightingale's character and consistency; it is almost as though his negative reaction to Miss Nightingale began to write the book, turning Professor Smith into a kind of retrospective investigative reporter instead of the thoughtful and informed social historian he obviously is. There are, in fact, hints in the text suggesting that this study started as a full-dress biography – which somehow evolved into a series of critical essays on key aspects of Nightingale's career. This reviewer, at least, wishes Smith had written that biography and used Florence Nightingale's career to tell us more about that Victorian England which allowed her to become the Lady with the Lamp. Even as it is, however, Smith's book is a fascinating and indispensable supplement to the still-standard biography by Sir Edward Cook.

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W. D. A. SMITH, *Under the influence. A history of nitrous oxide and oxygen anaesthesia*, London, Macmillan, 1982, 4to, pp. xxix, 188, illus., £12.00.

Dr Smith's book is a collection of thirteen papers originally published in the *British Journal of Anaesthesia* between 1960 and 1972, together with communications to the *British Dental Journal* (1968) and the *University of Leeds Review* (1975). The book represents fifteen years of meticulous, painstaking research. Smith fully covers the whole period from the first discovery of nitrous oxide and oxygen by Joseph Priestley to the attacks upon nitrous oxide launched by Courville, Bedford, and Bourne between 1952 and 1957, and the counter-attacks by Klock, Tom, and Mostert.

The chapters are, broadly speaking, in chronological order, presenting a picture of development from the early "straight gas" to the prolonged "gas and oxygen" of more recent times.