

Part of the myth of British enslavement of the Chinese through the opium trade is that prohibition by the Chinese authorities was an attempt to free its people from this enslavement. In debunking the myth, the authors say that we need to look to politics to understand how prohibition came about. While the point is made convincingly (with reference to the internal power struggles of Chinese politics) and usefully (there are those who think that drug policy does and should depend solely on pharmacology), it is hardly new or startling, either historically or sociologically, to say that drug policy is not a matter of mere pharmacology.

Written by and for China scholars, this book assumes a knowledge of Chinese history. The evidence is extensive and detailed and at times it is hard to see the forest of argument for the trees of detail. But, heavy-going though the read may sometimes be, *Narcotic Culture* is an important and timely challenge to a myth that remains one of the cornerstones of current international drug policy.

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*The Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease*. Edited by Kenneth F. Kiple (CUP, Cambridge, 2003, pb, ISBN 0-521-530261) xiii, 426pp.

THIS IS A VALUABLE REFERENCE WORK FOR ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN the history of medicine. The editor has brought together a range of historians and medical scientists to provide what few other books do: up-to-date, lucid and brief surveys of the aetiology, symptomology and histories of major, and some not so major, forms of illness.

The format is the same for each of the 161 alphabetically listed maladies. A section on 'characteristics' explains the nature of the disease according to modern medical science. Then the bulk of the entry considers its place in history, with an emphasis upon key discoveries and the condition's gradual delineation. The range of conditions covered is impressive: from AIDS and favism to SIDS and trichinosis. In each case, the medico-scientific side is well explained and easy to follow. The historical sections are often first-rate. These are necessarily short (usually about a page or two), but they are full of salient information on historical epidemiology as well as the attempts made to explain the different maladies over the course of recorded history.

Where appropriate, the historical sections also include discussions of the social dimensions of illness. The entry on AIDS, for instance, considers the processes of stigmatising sufferers and the selective attri-

bution of blame. The discussion of leprosy properly acknowledges the long history of casting out sufferers and the strong association of this affliction with sin and moral depravity; this account stresses the way in which epileptics were for long the objects of fear and loathing, subject to numerous legal restrictions and indignities. And the section on cholera quite rightly draws on the work of Erwin Ackerknecht to show the role of mercantile interests during the nineteenth century in causing many doctors and patients to deny the possibility of person-to-person transmission.

There are, though, a few unfortunate omissions. While epilepsy and ergotism gain inclusion, other mental maladies are almost entirely neglected: Edward Shorter's recent *A Historical Dictionary of Psychiatry* (OUP, 2005) effectively fills this gap. But it would have been preferable to have detailed discussions of important mental ailments—their biology, psychology, epidemiology and, particularly, their history—included in this book as well.

Doing justice to issues in the history of medicine requires a grasp of both science and culture. Often, the biological manifestations of illness are lost sight of in culturally oriented discussions, while in the scientific literature, the role of social attitudes is often obscured. Albeit economically, *The Cambridge Historical Dictionary of Disease* provides an awareness of both in a reliable and historically sensitive form. This makes it an ideal starting point for understanding the history of any of the maladies included.

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*Paradise of Quacks: An Alternative History of Medicine in Australia.* By Philippa Martyr (Macleay Press, Sydney, 2002, ISBN 1-876492-07-4) 394pp.

ALTHOUGH NOW A FEW YEARS OLD, *PARADISE OF QUACKS: AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF MEDICINE* in Australia remains unique as a study of 'alternative' medical practice in Australia. By focusing upon practitioners and healing methods outside of 'mainstream' medicine, this work enlarges the representation of Australian medical history and so contributes toward a fuller appreciation of Australia's medical roots. The ambitious timeframe covers the period 1788–2002, with an expanse of fascinating information made accessible to a broad range of readers. Martyr includes in her study some history of those 'alternative' medicines popular today, including naturopathy, homoeopa-