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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.

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Methods of manufacture and storage are fully described, together with the advance from primitive apparatus as used by Davy and Wells to the controllable nitrous oxide/oxygen percentage and pressure devices of Bert, Hewitt, and others.

Dr Smith pays attention to the no less important social aspect of his subject. He reproduces playbills advertising demonstrations of nitrous oxide and the title sheets of two comic songs, *Laughing Gas*. Smith fully discusses the mysterious *Dr Syntax in search of the grotesque* and concludes that this is unlikely to have been written by William Combe, author of the authentic Dr Syntax series, but is a pastiche. It is interesting that Smith should have considered Coleridge as a possible author, thus providing a direct link with Davy, but he leaves the question of authorship open. *In search of the grotesque* is of importance to the early history of nitrous oxide because it contains an apparently authentic description of a dental extraction under nitrous oxide anaesthesia in Paris before 1820, thus antedating Wells's famous experiment by over twenty years.

Two criticisms must be made. First, the presentation as a series of unedited papers is not altogether satisfactory. There is some repetition; for instance the same photograph of T. W. Evans appears on p. 75 and again on p. 93. Reference to a previous paper is muddling because the papers do not appear in the same order as originally published. Dr Smith explains in his preface that cost dictated this method of presentation. Second, the title *Under the influence*, illustrated on the dust-cover by a humorous print from Dr Syntax, is misleading, giving the impression that the content is suitable for light reading by the general public.

These are minor criticisms. The book may be regarded as the classic history of nitrous oxide. It is well produced with a generous number of illustrations, and is fully documented. A work which should be read by every anaesthetist who is interested in his subject and which should find a place in the library of the medical historian.

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MARTIN V. MELOSI (editor), *Pollution and reform in American cities, 1870–1930*, Austin and London, University of Texas Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. xii, 212, \$15.00.

Urban pollution was recognized to be more than just a nuisance in the cities of industrializing America. Smoke-stacks, horse-choked streets, and the ever-present din were taken to be signs of prosperity, but the problems of waste disposal and air, water, and noise pollution plagued administrators, stimulated reformers, and consumed the efforts of public health workers. Historians of public health and sanitation have generally focused on the growth of public health departments, the activities of physicians in fighting contagious disease, and the medical and epidemiological aspects of urban life. But the character and extent of pollution have not been equally analysed. Nor have municipal efforts to control urban degradation been approached in a way which can help historians of medicine understand the social and political context of public health campaigns.

This is a collection of essays on the history of those threats to health, safety, and comfort. Medical men and public health activists take a back seat to the emerging speciality of municipal engineer and groups such as the Ladies' Health Protective Association. Historians of medicine will be most interested in four of the essays in this volume, those on water supply, waste water control, clean air, and refuse pollution. But the supposed threat which street noise presented to sanity and the political activism which paralleled the growth of public health departments are also intriguing topics.

With a set of problems seen to pose health risks, it is not surprising that reformers turned to medicine for hints on curing this illness of the city. In the 1890s, streetsweepers in New York City were issued with medical style white uniforms. Their leader, the street-cleaning commissioner "Colonel" George E. Waring jr, turned his 2,000 men into a regiment which formed the shock troops of public health. Although their white smocks were hardly practical for the job, their association with cleanliness certainly attracted attention and helped form a useful *esprit de corps*.