

Book Reviews

Virgin Birth, edited by R. Silman. Pp. 114. WFT Press, London, 1991. Paperback £10.50.

Religious heresies abounded at the last approach of a millennium. As the next one nears we seem to be pursuing a number of 'medical heresies'. This is the theme of a series of books WFT Press have launched as the 20th century nears its end. The first of these, *Virgin Birth*, originates in the controversy which followed a letter to *The Lancet* written by Sue Jennings, a fertility counsellor at the Royal London Hospital. She described 'virgin birth syndrome', which she defined as 'women with no intention of having a sexual relationship who wish to have a child through assisted conception'.

In the ensuing London Hospital Medical College symposium, on which this book is based, Dr Jennings was joined by experts who share her interest in integrating medicine with the arts and humanities. The convener, Robert Silman, is not only a senior lecturer in reproductive physiology but has a degree in philosophy from the Sorbonne, and those presenting papers are no less remarkable. A lecturer in medical ethics, a former Anglican priest turned Roman Catholic journalist, a medical historian (who has written about her own experience of infertility), a lawyer, a child psychologist, a social anthropologist, a gynaecologist and the press officer for a major charity all submit their ideas for open discussion. Issues of fertility and assisted conception seem to give particular cause for dissent, and any professional involved in this field will find *Virgin Birth* a stimulating account. The seminar format may be hard to follow but it is rewarding.

Tara Kaufmann of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service is probably right to conclude that virgin birth is the least of the problems presented by new reproductive possibilities. More millennial pursuits to follow?

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North American Health Care Policy in the 1990s, edited by A. King, T. Hyclak, R. Thornton and S. McMahon. Pp. xi + 284, illustrated. Wiley, Chichester, 1993. Hardback, £35.00.

This book is an edited collection of papers delivered in a lecture series at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (USA) under the auspices of the Martindale Center for the Study of Private Enterprise, subsidized by the Canadian Embassy. The topics are examined under three rubrics: (1) 'conceptual issues in the design of national health policy'; (2) 'comparative studies of some of the

details of Canadian and American health care; and (3) 'a critique of the current US situation'. The authors are a mixed company: economists, political scientists, physician administrators; and geographically, American, Canadian and British.

Like most collections of essays on a central topic, there is an unevenness in style and approach, some duplication of argument, and even contradictions, not just differences of opinion. As might be expected from the sponsorship and the participants, the leitmotif is conservative, but there is a fairly strong support for the Canadian way. In the final and long chapter on US potentials for reform, the article is written by American Medical Association officials and their plan is clearly the choice.

The book offers some interesting and challenging reading, but it is not a definitive characterization of the differences between Canadian and US positions, approaches or possibilities. It lacks a unifying thread, or an overview and analysis that would be helpful. It is somewhat tilted to the conservative side, but maybe it reflects a conservative tilt in our society.

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Human Dissection for the Health Sciences, J.H. Langdon. Pp. 427, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £23.50.

I wish I had had this book when I started anatomy. There is an interesting preamble on the purposes of dissection, on the sources of the cadavers and on conduct in the Dissecting Room. The language of anatomy is explained. There are many simple line drawings, glossaries and also notes on the clinical implications which form the *raison d'être* for this subject. Highly recommended as an introductory handbook for medical students, physiotherapists and other paramedical workers.

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Human Nutrition and Dietetics, 9th Edition, edited by J.S. Garrow and W.P.T. James. Pp. 847, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, London, Edinburgh, New York, Tokyo, 1993. Paperback, £34.95.

This is the direct descendant of 'Davidson and Passmore'. The Scottish influence is maintained by Dr James and 16 of the other 49 contributors who otherwise represent a truly international team of known excellence. The book