

REVIEWS

Ian Glynn and Jenifer Glynn. *The Life and Death of Smallpox*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. x, 278. Cloth, \$25.00; ISBN 0-521-84542-4.

Edward Jenner, the discoverer of vaccination for smallpox, suggested in 1801 that the human race could now look forward to "the annihilation of the smallpox, the most dreadful scourge of the human species." In 1979 Jenner's vision became a reality when a global commission confirmed that the worldwide eradication campaign, begun in the 1960s, had succeeded. This was surely one of the most notable human achievements in all of history. Yet, the world cannot rest easy. Stores of the deadly virus still reside in American and Russian laboratory freezers, and no one can be totally sure that there are no other secret repositories or that bioterrorists have not gotten their hands on the ultimate biological weapon.

In *The Life and Death of Smallpox*, Ian and Jenifer Glynn, write both a "biography" of smallpox itself and an account of the centuries-long struggle to control the disease. The authors, a Cambridge University scientist (Ian) and historian (Jenifer), write for a lay audience, but without dumbing down their subject. They discuss the global impact of smallpox on the human race over several millennia and provide enough of a grounding in epidemiology, virology, and immunology to help readers understand the science involved in the ultimate conquest of this loathsome and deadly disease. They begin with a discussion of the possible origins of the disease, and then quickly move to the Age of Discovery when smallpox emerged as humankind's most deadly epidemic killer. By the end of the eighteenth century the death toll from smallpox in Europe alone, excluding Russia, was about 400,000 people a year. It left its telltale scars on untold millions of others.

Though the tale of the depredations of smallpox epidemics is well told, the heart of *The Life and Death of Smallpox* is its account of human efforts to control and prevent the disease. The Glynnns present a fascinating account of the introduction to Europe of the Eastern practice of inoculation (or variolation) in which individuals were "inoculated" with a mild case of smallpox to make them immune from a future more serious infection. The real turning point in the battle against smallpox, however, was Edward Jenner's discovery of vaccination at the end of the eighteenth century. Jenner, an English country doctor, discovered that infecting people with the related disease of cowpox (Latin for cow is "vacca," hence "vaccination") would impart immunity without the danger of spreading smallpox, one of the unintended consequences of the earlier practice of inoculation. Since humans are the only host species for the smallpox virus, vaccination made it possible to contemplate the eventual eradication of the disease. Accordingly, a good half of the book is devoted to the two-century campaign to rid the world of one of its greatest killers. The authors also provide a fascinating account of the dogged persistence of the anti-vaccinationist minority that refused to

accept the massive body of evidence that vaccination worked. Finally, in a bow to our post-9/11 preoccupations, the book finishes with an assessment of the threat posed by bioterrorism and the efforts to prepare for the horrifying possibility that smallpox could again be unleashed against a population that has lost its immunity.

Since the publication of William McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* in the mid 1970s, the history of epidemic disease has become a thriving cottage industry within the discipline. A course on the subject, or a section within a course, can provide students with a fascinating lens with which to view the past and to see the relevance of the past to the present. While *The Life and Death of Smallpox* would be useful for the teacher of such a course, either as a primer on the relevant science or a repository of interesting anecdotes, it would not be the best choice for assigned reading in an introductory course. The book focuses so single-mindedly on one disease that the broader ecological perspective that one finds in McNeill's book, or the classic studies of Alfred Crosby, is lost. The book might, however, be a useful addition to a seminar.

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Jerzy Lukowski. *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*. European Culture and Society Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp. x, 243. Paper, \$24.95; ISBN 0-333-65210-X.

As the title suggests, this book offers readers an exhaustive history of the customs, beliefs, rituals, and mores of the European nobility in the eighteenth century. The book has much to recommend it. For one, it is organized thematically, with each chapter addressing a particular aspect of noble life, from marriage, to economics, to education, to inheritance. By eschewing a chronological format, Professor Lukowski is able to present the history of the European nobility in a much more comprehensive and diverse fashion, giving the reader a fascinating glimpse into the everyday life of Europe. For another, the author considers nobility as a European wide phenomenon and in doing so he is able to demonstrate the notion that the institution of "nobility" was not a static one and varied greatly across the European continent, particularly between East and West.

Two broad themes emerge in the book. First, there exists a stereotype of the European nobility from that era as a privileged elite enjoying hedonistic, carefree existence on their manorial estates, free from any sort of worldly concern. As Professor Lukowski vividly illustrates in his book, this was by no means the case. While nobles did enjoy the benefits of great wealth and status, they were nonetheless burdened with numerous worries. For example, it is commonly taught in schools that tax exemptions given to nobles were a major cause of the French Revolution. While it is true that nobles did enjoy such exemptions, in times of war (rather frequent occurrences in the