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M.J. Daunton, ed., *Charity, Welfare and Self-Interest in the English Past*

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Review

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pages to the story told by Mary Anne Talbot, a crossdressing, publicity-seeking young woman in eighteenth-century London who claimed to have served under the name of John Taylor in the army and navy and on French and American merchant ships and to have been wounded in several major engagements. It is doubtful that Talbot, alias Taylor, ever went to sea. No John Taylor was mustered in any of the vessels she said she joined, and other archival sources fail to verify her sea adventures (See my book, *Female Tars: Women Afloat in the Age of Sail* [1996]). I also question Dugaw's conviction that "an increasingly commanding concept of female delicacy...ultimately put an end to the conventions and convictions that made possible...the celebrated sailing and soldiering of these cross-dressing women" (p. 53). It was not "the concept of female delicacy" but such prosaic causes as more rigorous physical examinations that discouraged women from joining ship's crews.

The book closes with Melody Graulich's "Opening Windows toward the Sea: Harmony and Reconciliation in American Women's Sea Literature." Her women writers speak for all women who gaze out to sea from the shore. She states: "The seashore reminds women of the need—the necessity—of reconciling forces that seem to be in opposition, of finding compromises. Of course, tidal identities and broken-down binary boundaries are more complex than my summary has made them sound" (p. 209). She may be right, but I am at a loss to know what this has to do with gender and seafaring.

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SUZANNE J. STARK

Martin Daunton, ed. *Charity, Self-Interest, and Welfare in the English Past*. (Neale Colloquium in British History.) New York: St. Martin's Press. 1996. Pp. x, 262. \$55.00. ISBN 0-312-16074-7.

This book is characterized by the intrinsic quality of the individual essays, all but one of which were originally delivered in the Neale Colloquium at University College, London, and by the coherent development of several useful themes. The book takes its title from the 1995 Neale Lecture, given by Richard Smith, director of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population. If Smith's chapter is the flagship, however, Martin Daunton's introduction charts the course, summarizing the warnings sounded by nearly all the contributors against embracing uncertain dichotomies and oversimplifications, e.g., the notion that charitable support from community and kin steadily yielded to statutory relief, culminating in the modern welfare state (pp. 53, 113); the belief that the quantitative study of welfare must prove more reliable than a "literary" approach (pp. 3, 56); and the perception that England was forward looking in establishing a compulsory system of parish rates as contrasted to the continental reliance on "voluntaryism" (p. 84). Such academic controversies acquire special relevance in an era when, as Daunton notes, "politicians pursue their own labour of restructuring the welfare state" (p. 17).

The contributors have read one another's work; informed dissent abounds. Smith adopts the thesis of "nuclear hardship" pioneered by Peter Laslett—the idea that English households, traditionally made up of only one generation and its offspring, routinely required external support at various points in the life cycle. In particular, aging parents experienced falling incomes precisely when their adult children, even if willing to help, were pressed by the demands of their own growing families. Drawing from his recent research on the situation of the elderly under the Old Poor Law of 1601, Smith concludes that parish relief made it easier for children to move away and at the same time probably encouraged "mutuality of

family support” by providing pensions even when children lived nearby (p. 39). Pat Thane, steering away from explanations based on the workings of the poor law, lays far more stress on the family’s voluntary contributions. She points to evidence from diaries, biographies, and community studies, suggesting that intergenerational support was “an important though not precisely quantifiable element” in the livelihoods of the elderly throughout the early modern period (p. 131).

Despite the title, there is little exploration of how charities operated, with the exception of Keir Waddington’s treatment of fundraising for London voluntary hospitals, which shows that no source of money was beyond reach in the Victorian era save direct state aid. But the larger issue of “charity” as a societal attitude and an aspect of policy does receive attention. Coin Jones, in a provocative survey of recent historiography, focuses on “charity” rather than “welfare” and broadens his study to include cultural history. This approach, he argues, can shed light on donors’ diverse aims, replacing the tired emphasis on “social control” with, among other things, a serious consideration of spiritual motives (pp. 58–59). The role of religion is also one lesson to be taken from the essays by Lynn Botelho and Brian Pullan, who point to the discretionary powers of godly overseers in Suffolk and caring priests in early modern Italy, respectively. Joanna Innes describes the eighteenth-century debate over “the mixed economy of welfare,” identifying several strands of argument among M.P.s and pamphleteers over “the best way forward.” “The trend over the period was in favour of ‘voluntary’ charity rather than ‘legal’ [tax-based] charity” (p. 169), but the theme of this chapter, like that of the book, is that there was no definitive trend, but instead cyclical experimentation with a variety of approaches. Paul Johnson reinforces this point for 1870–1939 by discarding the public/private dichotomy altogether. From the perspective of how risks were covered and who ultimately benefited, the Edwardian social insurance programs were less “progressive” than the Victorian Poor Law.

What trends, if any, exist in welfare history? The final chapter, crafted by Olive Anderson, offers “some concluding reflections” that add up to a lively and pointed critique of the entire book. In a sense, this leaves the reviewer with little to do, especially if he happens to agree with many of Anderson’s observations. She sees the field as having come of age—of being old enough to stand in need of revitalization. Future developments, she predicts, will include increased emphasis on the role of women as both recipients and providers in the welfare system, an issue Jane Lewis touches on in the current volume. The inclusion of an “internal” review is only one notable feature that distinguishes this collection from the run of published proceedings and festschriften. With luck, it will inspire imitation among those who present the results of scholarly collaboration in other areas of history.

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JOHN D. RAMSBOTTOM

Norma Myers. *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780–1830*. London: Frank Cass Publisher; dist. by ISBS, Inc., Portland, Oreg. 1996. Pp. ix, 157. \$35.00. ISBN 0-7146-4575-3.

The first set of studies on the history of blacks in Britain, completed largely in the 1980s, is over. These books, including those by Douglas Lorimer, Elizabeth Bolt, James Walvin, Follarin Shylon, Peter Fryer, and Ron Ramdin, documented key individuals, events, and issues and identified debates pertaining to the black presence. This book is at the vanguard of the second set of studies by scholars for whom the glamour of finding prominent names