

The conquest of water: the advent of health in the industrial age.

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The conquest of water: the advent of health in the industrial age.

Author(s) : [Goubert, J. P.](#)

Book : [The conquest of water: the advent of health in the industrial age.](#) 1989 pp

Abstract : As an apparent French equivalent of Lawrence Wright's *Clean and Beautiful*, charting the social history of water, sanitation and hygiene down the ages, this book promises a fascinating read. It offers many interesting anecdotes, drawn from a wide range of sources. However, whenever one seeks concrete information, the book unfailingly disappoints the reader. Statistics are quoted without adequate context, and survey results given without a description of how the san

chosen, and references are cited without dates. This is a great shame, as they have clearly done an immense amount of research.

The book does help to illustrate the degree to which many of the sanitary innovations which we take for granted today have only become available to most people in industrialized countries, during this century; it mentions that in the USA in 1880, for instance, 5 out of 6 households had no other means of washing themselves than soap and sponge, and most workers' families had no indoor sanitation.

The book is best approached, not as a source of such information, but as an anthropological account of the perceptions of water and hygiene in French 19th century culture. At a time when health educators in developing countries are refining their methods for persuading "them" to improve their hygiene like "us", there is much to be learned from how "we" perceived cleanliness until very recently, and sometimes not at all.
do.newline ~ *Sandy Cairncross*

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