

Book Reviews

CHRISTINA BYAM SHAW (ed.), *Pigeon holes of memory: the life and times of Dr John Mackenzie (1803–1886)*, London, Constable, 1988, 8vo, pp. 443, illus., £20.00.

John Mackenzie was born in northern Scotland in 1803. He studied medicine in Edinburgh, graduating in 1824. As part of his education he walked the wards of the London Hospital. He practised in the army and in Edinburgh and, after the cholera of 1832, left medicine for good and returned to the Highlands as farmer and landowner. In 1882, the 79-year-old man sat down to write his memoirs. This bare outline conveys nothing of the remarkable detail which, if his memory was at all accurate, filled Mackenzie's life. He was no great stylist, the anecdotes and stories scarcely flow. He was, however, clearly an unusual figure and his idiosyncrasy fills these pages. The medical entries are, sadly, short but nonetheless revealing, especially, if he is to be believed, about the prevalence and vigorousness of blood-letting in the 1820s. The memoirs are worth reading for more than the medical material. His recollections of Highland life during the Hungry Forties merit publication on their own. The volume is well-produced, the memoirs have been carefully edited and are extensively annotated. An indication in the text that original material had been deleted would have been valuable.

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HARTMUT GOETHE and CHRISTA LABAN, *Die individuellen Rettungsmittel: zur Geschichte von Rettungsboje, Rettungsring, und Schwimmweste*, Herford, Koehler, 1988, 8vo, pp. 307, illus.

If the fifth source of medical error, according to Blane, is "Ambiguity of Language" and "there can be no such thing as correct reasoning unless the same import be annexed to the same words", it is perhaps just as well that this is not a philosophical work. Coming to the conclusion that differences between "life-buoys", "life-belts" and "life-preservers" are almost impossible to define in one language, and explaining this in three languages in short order, leads very quickly to an advanced state of linguistic confusion. Add to this a total of 378 reference, many of which are already given in full in the text, and one can be forgiven for asking if the authors became so fascinated with the details of their search that they forgot they also wanted people to read the book.

It is, however the wealth of detail which makes it worth the effort of ploughing through this work, but only for those with a good reading knowledge of German, French, and English (p. 30 has 28 lines in French, 8 in German and 6 in English, p. 32 is completely in German, p. 33 has 11 lines of German, the rest English). The illustrations are a delight and a study in themselves. Could anyone but the Victorians have invented a life-belt of such dimensions (p. 112), that it could also be used for sport and pleasure? Most decidedly. The illustration for Cristoph Wagenseil's "*Wasserchild*" (water shield) of 1690 (p. 51) shows a child being carried high and dry with enough room for its toys as well; the device could also be used for such entertainments as "vocal or instrumental music on the water presented by sirens, or for shooting water birds, seals etc."

Belinda Heathcote