

PREFACE

This work grew from an observation made when I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. Reading about nineteenth-century medical giants, I frequently came across passing references to Xavier Bichat, reputedly a major vitalist and the father of histology. It seemed clear that at the beginning of the last century, the French medical establishment revered his contributions to medical teaching and to anatomy and physiology. But what had been said about him more recently, albeit flattering, tended to be vague, as though no one was quite sure what all the fuss had been about. A question to Dr Nikolaus Mani about why Bichat was so little known was the occasion for him suggesting Bichat's work as a suitable dissertation topic. That was completed more than a decade ago. Thereafter, I moved a considerable distance from Bichat into the earlier part of the eighteenth century. But as I read the work of many authors and especially vitalists of various sorts, I continually encountered foreshadowings of what Bichat wrote later. Thus this project, which studies Bichat in the context of eighteenth-century traditions, came to be.

In the meantime, other persons have contributed much material to the study of the medical, physiological, and social developments in the latter half of the eighteenth century, thereby elucidating Bichat's considerable contributions to developments in post-revolutionary France.

Persons who have read the manuscript at various stages of its preparation and to whom I owe special thanks for their advice and observations are the late Walter Pagel, Roger French, L. Pearce Williams, Frank Dougherty, and William Bynum.

I am grateful to the librarians and other staff members of the following centres for their unfailing patience and courtesy: the Memorial Library of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque de l'École de Médecine in Paris, the Bibliothèque de l'Université de Montpellier, Cambridge University Library, and the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London.

I acknowledge two research grants from the Canada Council, now the SSHRC. A travel grant allowed me to go to Montpellier in the summer of 1974, and a Leave Fellowship spared me the responsibility of teaching in the 1975–76 academic year. A Wellcome Fellowship awarded for 1977–78 permitted me to spend an enriching year at the University of Cambridge. That same year, a British Council Commonwealth University Interchange Scheme Travel Grant paid the expenses for travel to the United Kingdom.

Finally, I thank my husband David for unfailing support and patience.