

Book Reviews

ERNEST HEBERDEN, *William Heberden: physician in the Age of Reason*, Eponymists in Medicine, London, Royal Society of Medicine Services, 1990, 8vo, pp. xiv, 246, illus., £12.95, £7.95 (paperback).

There is a remarkable dearth of biographies of the major figures of eighteenth-century medicine. Radcliffe, Mead, Sir Hans Sloane and many others await accounts of their lives. Until now, William Heberden too has lacked a biographer but he has at last found one in a descendant separated from him by five generations.

Born in 1710, in Southwark, the second son of a coachman turned innkeeper, William Heberden exemplified the advantages of life in eighteenth-century England when, in the words of Mrs Piozzi, quoted at the beginning of this book, "Talent and conduct are sufficient to draw mean Birth and original Poverty out of the Shadow of Life and set their Merit open to the Sun". Heberden's biographer describes his origins, his education and work at Cambridge, his removal to London and subsequent establishment of the most important medical practice of the day. He was to be consulted by the leading figures of his generation, including Dr Johnson, to whom he was "*Ultimus Romanorum*", as well as by the King himself.

Heberden played a major role in the affairs of the Royal Society, where he served as one of the first members of the committee that, after 1752, introduced peer review of the papers offered for publication in the *Philosophical Transactions*. He was also highly influential in the Royal College of Physicians, though he never served as President, and it was he who established its *Medical Transactions* in 1767, where papers read before the College were published. It was in the first issue that Heberden gave his original presentation on angina pectoris, a model of clinical description that has not been bettered to this day. His medical experiences were written up in his *Commentaries on the history and cure of diseases*, completed in 1782 and published in Latin and English versions in 1802, the year after his death. It is among the *Commentaries* that the descriptions of the nodes that bear his name was included.

This admirable biography, written with verve and style and including numerous references to previously unpublished documents and personal letters, is an important contribution to the biographical literature of the eighteenth century.

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BRIGITTE LOHFF, *Die Suche nach der Wissenschaftlichkeit der Physiologie in der Zeit der Romantik: ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnisphilosophie der Medizin*, Medizin in Geschichte und Kultur 17, Stuttgart and New York, Gustav Fischer, 1990, 8vo, pp. xii, 262, DM 78.00, (paperback).

For about a century, science and medicine in the Romantic period were more or less regarded as fruitless endeavours. Characterizing this period as anti-empirical, historians had to hand a supposedly clear definition of what Romantic science was. Since then, a much more balanced and differentiated view has emerged. In pointing out the significance of the scientific contributions of that time, however, it has become impossible to uphold a unified view of "Romantic science".

In her intricate study, Brigitte Lohff is perfectly aware of that problem, and she is cautious enough to speak of "physiology in the time of Romanticism". It is characteristic of her approach that she avoids arbitrary classification of the physiologists as *Naturphilosophen* and anti-*Naturphilosophen*. For most, Dr Lohff argues, it is impossible to make such a distinction, because some of them, wary of many doctrines of *Naturphilosophie*, still willingly accepted some of Schelling's basic assumptions. Others, she continues, changed their opinions about the value of *Naturphilosophie* for physiology several times. One of the strengths of her study is that she not only discusses the few well-known heroes like Oken, Carus, and Burdach, but many forgotten authors like F. L. Augustin, A. W. Hecker, J. F. Ackermann, M. E. A. Neumann, and J. J. Dömling.

Instead of the usual categorization, Dr Lohff follows another strategy. Around 1800, physiology was in its infancy, she argues, and thus physiologists were searching for the epistemological and methodological foundations of their work. Dr Lohff finds a beautiful metaphor to describe her hypothesis: if one regards the development of physiology in the