

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This admirable biography, written with verve and style and including numerous references to previously unpublished documents and personal letters, is an important contribution to the biographical literature of the eighteenth century.

Sir Christopher Booth, Royal College of Physicians

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

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nineteenth century as a *Lehrbuch*, then the preface and introduction were written by the physiologists of the Romantic period. This view leads to the provocative and, I think, convincing hypothesis that the transition from “Romantic” to “scientific” physiology was characterized more by continuity than by discontinuity. To substantiate her hypothesis, the author analyses several problems in the establishment of physiology as a science. In a chapter on the problem of how to gain knowledge of nature, she shows that physiologists used Kant’s as well as Schelling’s writings in a heuristic way, without accepting their philosophical systems. Furthermore, Dr Lohff convincingly demonstrates that Schelling was not an anti-experimentalist, but integrated experimentation within his concept of science. For the physiologists, this provoked discussion of topics like the value of experimentation and the relations between empiricism and speculation, and perception and knowledge (*Wahrnehmung und Erkennen*).

The only irritating aspect of this book is that Dr Lohff completed her manuscript in 1985, so she does not take several more recent studies into consideration. She writes, for example, that Kant’s influence upon the sciences is more assumed by historians than precisely analysed (p. 14). This position cannot possibly be upheld after the compelling analyses of Timothy Lenoir, Frederick Gregory, and others. In conclusion, however, Brigitte Lohff has given us a very rich study with many new insights into that dazzling period between 1795 and 1830.

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L. S. JACYNA (ed.), *A tale of three cities: the correspondence of William Sharpey and Allen Thomson, Medical History Supplement 9*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1989, 8vo, pp. xxviii, 181, illus., £16.00 (UK & Eire), £21.00/\$32.00 (overseas, incl. p&p), from Professional & Scientific Publications, BMA House, Tavistock Sq., London WC1H 9JR (0-85484-090-7).

*A tale of three cities* is a fine demonstration of the value edited letters of noteworthy persons can have for historians. L. S. Jacyna has done historians of medicine a very considerable service by editing and publishing an extensive selection of the correspondence of William Sharpey (1802–1880) and Allen Thomson (1809–1884), two distinguished and influential Scottish anatomists and physiologists. The letters of these two men richly illuminate medical teaching, medical politics, especially of professorial positions, and physiological research in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

Found in the Library Store of Glasgow University in 1973, the correspondence is part of Glasgow’s large collection of papers of the Thomson family. It runs from 1836 to 1877. The occasion for its beginning was the removal of William Sharpey from Edinburgh in 1836 to take up the position of Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the University of London, a post he held for 38 years. His friend and partner in extra-mural teaching in Edinburgh, Allen Thomson, became a private physician to John Russell, sixth Duke of Bedford, and then pursued teaching opportunities in Edinburgh. In 1848 he became the Professor of Anatomy at Glasgow University and held this position for 29 years. Thus the three cities referred to in the title are Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London.

The majority of the letters are from Sharpey to Thomson although the collection also includes drafts and copies of Thomson letters as well as a limited number of letters by other individuals. Jacyna indicates that Thomson probably gathered together the letters and documents as sources for an obituary he was writing of Sharpey. A complete calendar of all the correspondence is included as an appendix to this volume.

Jacyna’s skill as an editor is clear in his lucid and informative introduction to the book, in the selection of the 99 letters presented, and in his identifying and explanatory notes accompanying each letter. It is notable, as Jacyna indicates, that Sharpey and Thomson made their livings by teaching and not by practice. Thus they are representatives of a type of medical man already established in France and Germany before mid-century but late in coming to Britain. Discussions of teaching positions for themselves and others and the politics of obtaining such posts predominate in many of the letters and give a real sense of career strategies and opportunities. The letters also afford important insights into the advent of microscopes in