

Book Reviews

shallow and naïve. She is, for example, determined that both her practitioners should appear only in the best light—they both “ont su parfaitement s’adapter à leur époque” (p. 155). At times this approach can only have been sustained by a remarkable inability to consider the evidence put forward. Mme Tempère relies heavily on oral sources, and these occasionally reveal tantalizing snippets of evidence which suggest a falling-off from perfection. Raoul Serullaz, for example, was overwhelmed by work, and generally took two days to answer a patient’s summons (p. 74). Partensky took great pride in his abilities as a general practitioner, and never referred his patients if he could help it. The local midwife commented that he took enormous risks (p. 117). These windows on the realities of rural practice pass without comment. Yet it is in these that the real interest of Tempère’s book lies, and the value of her work is as raw material for the better informed studies of French rural medical practice that may be forthcoming in due course.

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ALEX SAKULA, *Royal Society of Medicine, London: portraits, paintings and sculptures*, London, Royal Society of Medicine Services Ltd., 1988, 8vo, pp. xiii, 194, illus., £20.00.

The Royal Society of Medicine (founded 1805) performs many of the roles of a West End gentlemen’s (and ladies’) club, a national medical library, and a professional corporate body. These achievements are illuminated in the portraits and other works of art displayed in its elegant premises at 1 Wimpole Street, London W1. The prestige and antiquity of medicine are represented through the Old Master paintings and the portraits of figures illustrious before the Society’s foundation (Harvey, Erasmus Darwin, Jenner, Gerhard van Swieten). Portraits of the Society’s officers tell something of the vicissitudes which make up its history (the absence of Osler’s face being due to his refusal to serve). The whole collection, excluding the Society’s prints, is adequately recorded for the first time in the present catalogue, which contains excellent colour reproductions of every item, information about the subjects, statements of authorship and (where known) provenance, and points of interest. It contains 54 oils, 19 sculptures, 22 drawings and 2 watercolours.

The documentation provided by the catalogue will be useful from several points of view. It provides a freeze-view of the game of musical chairs in which works belonging to one body and recorded in its catalogue have been lent to another (in this case, the RSM, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Royal College of Physicians). The portraits of dental specialists, gathered here largely as a result of the Odontological Society’s incorporation into the RSM in 1907, provide some exceptionally striking pictures lost to the British Dental Association (Samuel Cartwright senior by John Wood, William Harrison by Ambrosini Jérôme). The survival of Old Master traditions is seen in a number of later works, notably Northcote’s Rubensian picture of Alexander I, Emperor of Russia, about to resuscitate a drowned man, and E. A. Ward’s portrait of Sir W. S. Church, a Rembrandt pastiche painted in 1922. The author is to be congratulated on recovering the names of artists and sitters where they had been forgotten (James Archer and Sidney Starr among the former; Russell Reynolds, the radiologist, among the latter).

Although the catalogue inevitably leaves many loose ends, especially in matters of provenance, it has been compiled to such a level of adequacy that another catalogue of the same pictures will probably never be needed. On the other hand, the preservation of pictures and their frames from the hostile effects of their environment (fading, desiccation, trauma) is a never-ending task. The devotion to its service evinced in the present publication may now serve the Society as a model in its labour of ensuring that the catalogue continues to reflect the present splendid reality of the collection.

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