

Book Reviews

KENNETH DEWHURST (editor), *Richard Lower's Vindicatio: A defence of the experimental method*, Oxford, Sandford Publications, 1983, pp. xxxiv, 313, [including facsimile], £25.00.

Lower's vindication of Thomas Willis's *Diatriba de febribus* (1659) against the attack of the Irish physician Edmund O'Meara (in *Examen diatribae Thomae Willisii . . . de febribus*, London, 1665) is an important work in its own right. Lower was among the vanguard of new physiological theorists and in this short work he went beyond his brief for the defence of Willis. The *Vindicatio* (1665) was written at a time when physiological theory was developing apace as a result of Harvey's discovery of the circulation, Descartes' mechanistic attempts to explain the workings of the body, and the increasing sophistication of the new experimentalism. Lower here brings all these developments together, first summing up the current position and then taking it a little further by way of a prelude to his own major contribution, the *Tractatus de corde* (London, 1669). The *Vindicatio*, therefore, is a highly succinct and forceful account of some of the most exciting ideas in early modern medicine and Dr Dewhurst and his publishers are to be congratulated for providing this excellent new edition. As well as Dr Dewhurst's introductory commentary and notes, the reader has the benefit of a highly competent translation by Leofranc Holford-Strevens. The translator has responsibly chosen to provide a very literal translation. Although this does not always read perfectly smoothly for the modern reader, the meaning is usually clear enough and the confusing or solecistic passages reflect revealingly upon Lower himself and not upon Mr Holford-Strevens. Dr Dewhurst's 'Introduction' and 'Epilogue' place the *Vindicatio* in its context as part of a polemic about medical theory and practice. The opening salvo by O'Meara and the subsequent defence of the Irishman against Lower by Conlan Cashin (in *Willisius male vindicatus*, Dublin, 1667) are ably summarized. There are only two significant faults in these summaries and the annotations. The first is a failure to describe and analyse adequately the heavy emphasis on *logic* of Lower's two antagonists. O'Meara and Cashin repeatedly object to the notions of Willis and Lower respectively on grounds of inadequacies of definition and logic. Dewhurst points these out but he does not provide the modern reader, usually even more ignorant than Lower of "the tight conceptual framework of scholastic logic" (p.xxi), with much help in understanding the traditionalist approach. Second, and perhaps more important for understanding Lower's arguments (rather than O'Meara's or Cashin's), Dewhurst might have provided a more detailed exposition of the crucial concept of "Cartesian fire" and the provenance and role of "nitrosulphureous ferments" in Lower's thought. Here, though, the reader does have the benefit, as Dr Dewhurst points out, of Robert Frank's discussion in *Harvey and the Oxford physiologists* (Berkeley, 1980). These shortcomings do not seriously detract from what are, after all, only brief accounts of this important polemic. In presenting this new edition, Dr Dewhurst has enabled Richard Lower to speak for himself once again. We must thank him for that.

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SIR GORDON WOLSTENHOLME (editor), *Lives of the Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians (Munk's Roll)*, Oxford and Washington DC, IRL Press; vol. 6: 1966–75, 1982, 8vo, pp. xi, 505, illus., £25.00; vol. 7: 1976–83, 1984, 8vo, pp. xi, 646, illus., £35.00.

The appearance of two new volumes of *Munk's Roll* in such quick succession might alarmingly suggest that the plague had broken out in the College's fine building in Regent's Park. Happily, this is not the case, the volumes resulting from the increased number of Fellows and from the prompt publication of the latest volume, recording obituaries of Fellows dying between 1976 and 1983. Indeed, so up to date is this particular supplement that it includes a life of S.T. Anning (d. 9 November 1983), whose last article appeared in the October 1984 issue of this journal.