

Book Reviews

relatively obscure, he was once sufficiently distinguished to attract an assiduous nineteenth-century biographer, Ebenezer Henderson. Not quite assiduous enough, however, for as Millburn shows, on several occasions, Henderson writing in Scotland must have been fed spurious manuscripts by his creative researcher in London, Mr Augustus Bart.

Ferguson began his London career as a limner, drawing relatively cheap portraits in China ink. From the start, however, he endeavoured to turn his astronomical and mathematical talents into coin. He began by producing *Astronomical Rotulas*—paper discs bearing scales and calendar information. Next he began to design orreries. He then moved into the lecture circuit, discoursing on Newton and the Creation. Writing popular expositions of astronomy came next. Innovation fed on innovation, his lectures illustrating his devices and his devices illustrating his books. Much of Ferguson's life was spent away from home on the provincial circuit, and he spent months on end in Bristol, Bath, and Birmingham.

These bare bones of Ferguson's life Millburn animates and clothes with extensive historical research and restrained narration. Every conceivable source that might throw light on Ferguson's career seems to have been exhausted. Millburn chronicles in precise but never tedious detail the career of Ferguson's public face: the inventor, the lecturer, the impoverished author, and family man. Millburn also reveals the private world which contained the ambitious entrepreneur, the affluent Scot, and the unhappy husband. For the medical historian Ferguson's career has only a few obvious points of contact: he lectured on natural philosophy at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and, on his death, William Buchan purchased his instruments. Ferguson's significance for the history of medicine lies elsewhere. Using the example of William Hunter, Roy Porter has shown how it is possible to illuminate the career of eighteenth-century doctors by mapping them not on to medicine, but on to the Enlightenment economy. Millburn does not attempt any such analysis with Ferguson, the aim of the book being more limited in this respect, but the parallels between Ferguson's career and that of William Hunter leap out at the reader. Both left Scotland for London. Both hunted out patrons: William Smellie and James Douglas in Hunter's case; the Rt. Hon. Stephen Poyntz, Martin Folkes, and Colin Maclaurin in the instance of Ferguson. Both cornered an emerging market: Hunter pioneered anatomy for surgeons and Ferguson created astronomy for the layman. Both attached their names to worthy intellectual products: Paris anatomy in Hunter's case, John Senax's Globes in Ferguson's instance (he bought them). Both claimed to be original inventors or discoverers and both engaged in vigorous priority disputes: Hunter over the discovery of the lymphatics, Ferguson over the means of attaining an accurate scriptural chronology. Both were talented in self-advertisement: Hunter on his method of teaching anatomy, Ferguson on such inventions as the orreries and clocks. Finally, both Hunter and Ferguson turned to account an Enlightenment creation not usually construed in economic terms—female sensibility. Hunter, through his midwifery, and Ferguson, in his astronomy for young ladies, exploited the new model of female refinement. These and many other parallels suggest the essential correctness of Porter's model and indicate how it might be employed to explore and help explain the success or failure of other careers in the emerging consumer society of the Enlightenment.

Christopher Lawrence, Wellcome Institute

JOHN T. ALEXANDER, *Catherine the Great: life and legend*, Oxford University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xii, 418, illus., \$24.95, £16.95.

John Alexander, Professor of History and Soviet and East European Studies at the University of Kansas, has spent 20 years, one of them at Moscow and Leningrad, researching this book. Surprisingly enough, there is no Soviet biography of Catherine the Great who reigned from 1762 to 1796. The author aims at bridging the gap between specialized studies and popular accounts, "long on gossip and drama, but short on facts and context", to present a fresh portrait of Catherine, the ruler and woman. In reconstructing her life he has stressed the questions of health, mental and physical, and attempted to "address soberly the issue of her sexuality".

Book Reviews

The medico-historical element is well represented by Professor Alexander, whose other publications in this field complement the present work. Three main categories emerge: Catherine's own health and approach to medicine; medical reforms, hospitals, and smallpox inoculation; and the Moscow Plague of 1770–2. In view of her known scepticism of medical theory and practice and the dearth of documentary material, the author has resourcefully portrayed her attitudes towards health and sickness, her emotional and physical crises. His more expanded treatment of medicine at Catherine's court in V. Nutton (ed.), *Medicine at the courts of Europe* (1989) provides a useful supplement. A succinct account is given of Catherine's important role in reforming the Medical Chancery into the Medical Collegium in November 1763, leading to radical changes which also exempted court medical practitioners from the Collegium's jurisdiction. The episode of Dr Thomas Dimsdale's inoculation of Catherine and her son Paul for smallpox in St Petersburg in October 1768 is also handled dexterously and placed in context. But possibly the greatest medical interest attaches to the virulent Moscow Plague of 1770–2, subheaded here 'The pestilential distemper', and 'The plague riot' that resulted from Muscovites' dissatisfaction with the imposition of compulsory quarantines, a subject which is graphically described along with Catherine's reactions. Sensibly, a separate chapter is devoted to 'Nymphomania? Favorites and Favoritism' and an epilogue to the 'Legend of Catherine the Great'—of good value in themselves.

Professor Alexander's authoritative book is very well researched, organized, paced and written. Balanced, it combines a judicious blend of narrative and commentary. On the whole he succeeds admirably in his aims and in bringing Catherine to life, although some items, perforce, are too condensed for easy assimilation. Readers of *Medical History* will find this biography of Catherine the Great makes excellent reading.

John H. Appleby, Norwich

GUNTER MANN and FRANZ DUMONT (eds.), *Gehirn-Nerven-Seele: Anatomie und Physiologie im Umfeld S. Th. Soemmerrings*, Soemmerring-Forschungen III, Veröff. d. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz), Stuttgart and New York, Gustav Fischer, 1988, 8vo, pp. 473, illus., DM 124.00.

The one book that probably did more than any other to narrow our perception of the gap between man and the anthropoid apes was T. H. Huxley's *Man's place in nature* (1863). It is well known that Huxley's theory of human evolution was inspired by Darwin; less well known, however, is that *Man's place in nature* was the outcome of a controversy with Richard Owen who, unlike Huxley, tried to widen the gap between apes and humans by placing the latter in a separate sub-class, the *Archencephala*, defined on the basis of certain features of the human brain. Also less well known is that the Huxley-Owen clash had its contemporaneous parallel in Germany, in a conflict between the materialist Karl Vogt and the physiologist-cum-spiritist Rudolf Wagner. The hope of Wagner and many others was to find an indication in the human brain of the spiritual nature of *homo sapiens*. Wagner's trophy in his "soul-searching" endeavour was the brain of the famous Göttingen mathematician J. K. F. Gauss, donated by Gauss jun. to anatomical science. Wagner's *Der Kampf um die Seele* (1875) or Emil Huschke's *Schädel, Hirn und Seele* (1854) are just two of many publications, the titles of which exemplify the tremendous interest which existed in the study of human and simian neuro-anatomy and -physiology because of the search for criteria of human uniqueness.

As the most logical starting point for this fascinating early- and mid-nineteenth century debate about the brain, one could take Samuel Thomas Sömmerring's booklet *Das Organ der Seele* (1796), in which he speculated that the seat of a *sensorum commune* is the intraventricular cerebrospinal fluid. Gunter Mann and Franz Dumont are to be congratulated for having chosen "brain, nerves, and soul" as the subject matter for this third volume of Sömmerring-Forschungen and for having put together this fine collection of 16 contributions. The subject of Sömmerring's doctoral thesis, *De basi encephali originibusque nervorum cranio egressantium* (1778) started him off on his chief area of expertise, namely neuro-anatomy. His interest in the