

Book Reviews

SHIRLEY ROBERTS, *Sophia Jex-Blake: a woman pioneer in nineteenth-century medical reform*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. x, 207, illus., £40.00 (0-415-08753-8).

Sophia Jex-Blake's battle for women to train as doctors at Edinburgh University has been told in various books about women's struggle for medical education and formed the subject of a television series some years ago. But there was more to her life than that particular battle, and as there is no contemporary biography of her this book fills a gap.

No new sources have emerged since Sophia's close friend, Margaret Todd, wrote a biography in 1918 which has formed the basis of everything that has been written about her since. Our understanding of the world Sophia inhabited has deepened, however, and it would have added substance to the story to have drawn on this. Ms Roberts has made little effort to do so. Some attempt to grapple with the crucial ideology of "separate spheres" of male and female lives would have been particularly helpful.

A snare that awaits any historian working on original source material is of uncritically thinking in the style and content of the time. When providing background on a contemporary of Sophia's, Elizabeth Garrett-Anderson, Ms Roberts writes (and she is not quoting anyone else), "During the six months that she spent in a busy surgical ward she was exposed to every situation that could frighten or offend a lady of delicate sensibility." Oh dear. When it comes to Sophia herself we may be thankful that Ms Roberts does not attempt any glib psychoanalysis of her difficult and self-destructive subject, but she goes to the other extreme in stating that Sophia suffered from neurasthenia, a word redolent of the Victorian era which sounds risible today.

Sophia's role in British women's struggle to be allowed to study and practise medicine was undoubtedly crucial. Apart from the Edinburgh fight, she was the founder of the London School of Medicine for Women (from which she subsequently severed all connection) and also started her own school of medicine in Edinburgh (from which Elsie Inglis and other disaffected students departed to form a rival establishment which forced the closure of Sophia's). She had great strength of character but an inability to appreciate other viewpoints. She did maintain some deep and lifelong friendships, but she also managed to alienate any number of her contemporaries, thereby losing the chance to enjoy the fruits of victory. It is a sad story and one worth telling.

The book is always readable, but rather plodding; it really only comes to life when dealing with the Edinburgh fight. The lengths to which the opposition were willing to go in order to keep those women out seem so extraordinary that that part of the story makes fascinating reading. It is not at all surprising that what later commentators have chosen to concentrate on is that short period of her life.

Leah Leneman, University of Edinburgh

WILLIAM WAUGH, *A history of the British Orthopaedic Association: the first seventy-five years*, London, British Orthopaedic Association, 1993, pp. xiii, 400, illus., £18 (+p&p UK £3.30, worldwide £3.50, hardback 0-9521874-0-X), presentation volume £75, available from BOA, 35-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PN.

The occasion has been matched by the choice of author. Professor Waugh has already established a reputation in the history of orthopaedics, to which this volume will add lustre. At a time when it is still possible for one man to have worked with some of the great surgeons, and to have had the opportunity of speaking with many who had themselves been trained by the pioneers or their pupils, it is appropriate that there should be a record. By the centenary of the Association, no one will be left to recount the age of the giants. Giants? Indeed, for they founded, established and saw to acceptance and success, a branch of surgery previously disregarded, and did so against considerable professional opposition. It is this story which William Waugh has told skilfully, perceptively, and from within an active professional discipline, while respecting the rigour of the no less professional historian.

This reviewer has himself worked under, or met, some of those mentioned in these pages, and can confirm that the portraits given are accurate and just. Obituaries necessarily contribute to an assessment of a character and an influence, but this book is not merely a digest of funeral orations. To summarize a life is very difficult, but often necessary. The man is presented to us, with his

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problems, his achievements and his failures, as he appeared to contemporaries, pupils and successors, as well as to those who are the heirs of a tradition to which he contributed. I recall, dimly, reading a remark of Kipling's, that a teacher is at the mercy of his disciples. It was well said. In this instance the disciples are shown to have been worthy. They had their own successes and failures—who has not? It is one of the merits of this book that it has been written by a practising surgeon, a teacher, as well as an historian who can balance both sides of his narrative, for narrative and personal history it certainly is.

Another merit is to emphasize the link between the British and American schools of orthopaedic thought and practice, founded at the inception of the British Orthopaedic Association, towards the end of the First World War, a beneficent influence which persists after three-quarters of a century. It pays deserved tribute to the ABC Club, a lively evidence of that link. Any practising surgeon knows how difficult it is to run a service department and to combine it with clinical research. The struggles of the British Orthopaedic Research Society are appreciatively noticed.

One of the strengths of the book is that it relates how needs were perceived and met, from local matters to the gradual formation of a national service; how it was organized at different levels and how it has developed in Britain. Even after forty-five years in orthopaedics one can discover an influence, an achievement which one did not know. The book will be extremely helpful to future historians, because it is so evidently based on wide and deep research, though the author never intrudes and wears his learning lightly.

Only one typographic error has been detected: "discrete" for "discreet" (p.252). The book is well printed, strongly bound and well, though perhaps a little sparsely, illustrated. The index is good. All in all, an excellent piece of work, a credit to the author and to the Association, and one which will be of lasting value.

J. W. Dickson, Ipswich

J. H. P. PAFFORD, *John Clavell, 1601–43: highwayman, author, lawyer, doctor*, Oxford, Leopard's Head Press, 1993, pp. xiv, 309, £12.50 (0–904920–28–3). Distributed by Oxbow Books, Park End Place, Oxford OX1 1HN.

John Clavell was "a great theefe, then a phisition" with aristocratic patients. His forgotten life has been painstakingly rediscovered by a distinguished librarian. Clavell was an impoverished gentleman, pardoned after stealing silver from Brasenose College, but his fame derived from his escape in 1626 from execution for highway robbery. He wrote a verse appeal for his reprieve, published a *Recantation* in verse, detailing the tricks of the highwayman's trade, and wrote a play about financial trickery. Literary London was unlikely to keep him out of trouble so his uncle sent him to Dublin in 1631 to act in a property dispute. He later practised there as a lawyer and as a physician, under the patronage of the Earl of Cork and Lord Chancellor Loftus. In the late 1630s, he was back in London but his last years remain obscure.

Clavell's life is deftly recreated but the bulk of this book consists of a reprint of the *Recantation*, and extracts from Clavell's manuscript remains. Of particular interest are the full transcription of a list of cures and a selection of some 70 prescriptions. The 30 cures of named patients are mostly in the form of testimonials, although clearly written by Clavell. This material is invaluable for the history of medicine in early Stuart Ireland and of empirics in general. Clavell practised at all levels of Dublin society, having sufficient Latin to produce a credible version of popular Galenism. He states that he made up his own prescriptions, lacking a reliable apothecary, that he was paid by results, that he diagnosed by both urine and symptoms, that he only used non-sorcerous methods, that he never failed, and that he gave the credit to God. The recipes given here are mostly herbal, of the sort found in domestic collections. However, a facsimile is provided of a recipe for using the notorious antimonial cup of John Evans. Clavell was probably personally acquainted with the disreputable priest-physician and his pupil, William Lilly.

The transcriptions are reliable, although they are heavily modernized and redundant headings are added to the cures. The words, "then a phisition", are inexplicably omitted from the description of Lilly's nativity of Clavell (p.16). It is unfortunate that the author does not mention the location of the