

## Book Reviews

Henry Cockburn who claimed in 1856 that in the 1790s the Whigs in Edinburgh were few and embattled, fighting for their views and careers against the dominant Tories who exploited the fears aroused in Britain by the execution of Louis XIV and the Terror. Cockburn identified John Allen and John Thomson, of the medical profession, as active and fearless in the Whig cause. Though much has been written about the early Edinburgh Reviewers and about Dugald Stewart and John Playfair, their Whig mentors in the University, Allen and Thomson have been unjustly neglected.

Jacyna's book is mainly devoted to the careers in Edinburgh of John Thomson (1765–1846) and his family, with one chapter about John Allen, a close friend of Thomson, a physiologist, and in the early 1790s a Friend of the People. They are characterized as philosophical Whigs who believed in citizenship, freedom, liberty, reason and science. Jacyna shows that Allen, with his reputed atheism and his public materialism, found it possible to survive as a lecturer in physiology in hostile and Tory Edinburgh only from 1794 to 1802, when he joined the Holland House coterie in London and abandoned medicine. In contrast, Thomson not only survived in Edinburgh: he prospered to the tune of suggesting and occupying three medical chairs, namely, surgery at the College of Surgeons (1804–21), military surgery (1806–22) and general pathology (1831–42) at the University. Much of Jacyna's book is devoted to the ways in which Thomson acted as an entrepreneur in a political environment that was often hostile and a medical one that was acrimoniously competitive. Jacyna argues convincingly that Thomson's Whiggery crucially benefited his career: he owed both his University posts to his Whig chums in government who created Regius chairs for him. Apropos Whig science in Edinburgh, Jacyna confesses that he cannot identify any particular doctrine as characteristic; but, in the case of Thomson, he sees the Whiggery as most manifest in Thomson's debts in his teaching to Stewart's philosophy of mind.

Jacyna sells the Thomson medical dynasty a little short in two respects. His terminus date is 1848 when Allen Thomson, John's second surviving son named after John Allen, left Edinburgh University, where he was a professor of physiology, for the chair of anatomy at Glasgow. There Allen joined his elder brother William (1802–52) who was professor of the practice of medicine. Though Jacyna is illuminating on the Thomson sons before they went to Glasgow, he says little about their activities there. In Edinburgh in the 1820s John Thomson was mentor to two adopted medical sons, Robert Carswell and John William Turner. The former became the first professor of pathological anatomy at University College, London, a hot-bed of Edinburgh Whiggery. In 1831 Turner became the first occupant of the Regius chair of surgery at Edinburgh University, a post created by Thomson's influence with the Whig government. As with the two Thomson sons, Jacyna says little about the peaks of the careers of Carswell and Turner. That said, one welcomes the care and competence with which Jacyna has drawn on a wide range of unpublished and published sources (both modern and ancient) to produce a dependable and perceptive account of an important Scottish medical family.

**Jack Morrell, Bradford**

**Arthur MacGregor** (ed.), *Sir Hans Sloane: collector, scientist, antiquary*, London, British Museum Press in association with Alistair McAlpine, 1994, pp. 308, illus., £50.00 (0-7141-2085-5).

According to Horace Walpole, Hans Sloane valued his collections "at fourscore thousand; and so would anybody, [he continued,] who loves hippopotamuses, sharks with one ear, and spiders as big as geese!" Many, like Walpole, thought them highly amusing. But beyond satirical mirth, what significance did Sloane's museum have for his contemporaries, and what has been its lasting importance? This

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handsome, lavishly illustrated, book promises answers to both questions.

After moving to London at the age of nineteen, Sloane pursued early studies in chemistry and botany. Professionally inspired by Thomas Sydenham and philosophically influenced by John Ray, Robert Boyle and Joseph de Tournefort, Sloane took up medical practice as an ideal calling that allowed him to combine work and virtuosic diversion. Like many early collectors, his habit began on youthful botanizing trips; a voyage to Jamaica saw it flourish; and growing financial security in his middle years allowed him both to gather more and more objects, and also increasingly to buy up the fruits of other collectors' industry. By 1753, his holdings included some fifteen hundred shells, over twelve thousand vegetables, and no less than twenty-three thousand medals. As John Thackray points out in his chapter, what Sloane lacked in discrimination he more than made up for in comprehensiveness.

Timed to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the opening of the British Museum, this volume is an assessment of Sloane's collecting activities presented in some sixteen curatorial divisions ranging from insects to ethnographic collections. Almost every chapter is crammed with fascinating details: for example, that unlike Linnaeus, Sloane arranged his botanical collections with more than one specimen per page, thereby reducing the possibility of rearranging pages for the sake of reclassification; that Sloane gathered his collection of Egyptian antiquities inspired by a profound hostility to what his contemporary John Woodward called a "barbarous and uncouth" culture; that a number of the 760 specimens in his *humana* collection were clearly prepared for didactic purposes; and, best of all, that the recipe for Cadbury's drinking chocolate was based on "Sir Hans Sloane's Milk Chocolate".

Particularly successful chapters are Ian Jenkins' on Sloane's classical antiquities, John Thackray's description of his mineral and fossil collections, and Marjorie Caygill's analysis of the establishment of the British Museum.

Jenkins sees Sloane amassing his collection of classical material culture in an attempt to explore the "microcosm". For Thackray, the mineral and fossil collections only make sense in the context of contemporary philosophical debates. And Caygill sensibly warns against the teleological temptation of crediting Sloane with an insight into what the British Museum would become, going on to advance a number of speculations about what really lay behind his "visionary" gesture.

What distinguishes these contributions from the majority of others is the care that their authors take to assess the meaning of Sloane's efforts in the intellectual context of his own time. Much of the rest of the book unfortunately adds little to our understanding of either what Sloane was up to or indeed of its significance for us today, beyond a count of what of the original specimens survive. The reasons for this shortcoming are twofold. First, in dividing the book along modern-day curatorial lines many of Sloane's motivations and interests have inevitably been obscured; for the most extraordinary aspect of the story is precisely that all the material was gathered by one man motivated by what he saw as a unified rationale. Second, almost all the authors are themselves museum professionals, which has resulted in many of the essays being of more curatorial than historical value. Thus while Arthur MacGregor is to be heartily congratulated on producing a beautiful book, rich in painstakingly gathered and splendidly compiled facts about the breadth of Sloane's enterprise—many of them new—this book advances us little in assessing what it all actually meant.

**Ken Arnold**, Wellcome Institute

**Richard J Wolfe and Leonard F Menczer** (eds), *I awaken to glory: essays celebrating the sesquicentennial of the discovery of anaesthesia by Horace Wells*, Boston, The Francis A Countway Library of Medicine, in association with the Historical Museum of Medicine and Dentistry, Hartford, 1994, pp. xvii, 442, illus., \$28.95 (0-88135-161-X).