

## Book Reviews

treasure house waiting to be plundered by historians of other persuasions, who will be immensely grateful for his painstaking research, his marshalling of the primary sources, and his descriptions of the artefacts themselves. The one type of history needs, and feeds on, the other.

*The obstetrician's armamentarium* stays close to the instrumentation, spanning the seventeenth to early twentieth centuries, and has copious illustrations. It is strong on description, but also on quotation from original accounts of new or modified devices. Not all modifications were intended to assist the process of birth. Thus we learn that, in 1889, certain folding bladed forceps were advocated by their inventor as a solution to the problem of the "country practitioner who ... found himself seated perhaps on a restive horse with a long forceps dangling against its sides, on a dark night and on a dangerous road". And not all arguments in favour of instruments were made on medical grounds alone. Advocating the use of craniotomy forceps to destroy the child in obstructed labour in 1891, one American obstetrician asserted "we know that almost all those cases occur among the poorest classes; that a large number of these children die within one year; that scarcely one half live five years, and that life for many of the survivors is misery. Taking all these facts into consideration, I do not hesitate to perform craniotomy, even on a living child, when it is necessary to save the life of the mother."

Often the text raises potentially fascinating questions. Frequently we hear of discrepancies between British, Continental and US instrumental practice. Why was this? And was British, Continental or US practice indeed uniform, or could further distinctions be made? Disputes, a traditional and still fruitful focus for science, technology and society research, abound. The reader must not expect to find these perspectives explored in the text, nor any analysis of the many original illustrations

reproduced. But as a rich sourcebook and stimulus for further research, Hibbard's book is inspiring, and as an introduction to technical changes in obstetric instrumentation over three centuries it is unsurpassed.

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**Susan Mann** (ed.), *The war diary of Clare Gass, 1915–1918*, Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000, pp. xlvii, 306, illus., £24.95 (hardback 0-7735-2126-7).

Clare Gass was one of 73 nursing sisters from McGill Hospital who went to France in 1915, along with 35 officers and 130 rank and file, to form the Third Canadian General Hospital, where she had the rank of Lieutenant in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC). The officer in charge of medicine was Lt Colonel John McCrae, whose poem *In Flanders Fields* became world famous. Interestingly Clare Gass quotes the poem in her diary entry of October 30, some six weeks before it was published in the magazine *Punch*.

The diary is one of the few written in wartime by Canadian nurses to reach a public archive. It starts in March 1915, just before embarkation from Canada, and ends with her return home in December 1918. She served in eight hospitals, including Buxton and Taplow in the United Kingdom, and Boulogne in France. While she was working in the Second Canadian Casualty Clearing Station in the Ypres salient area, it came under shellfire and eventually the staff had to be evacuated rapidly in the face of the advancing German army.

In the early years, the diary entries include comments about social and off-duty activities, enlivened by poems and

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photographs, which were taken in defiance of regulations. The diary gives some insight into living conditions. Sometimes the nurses lived in wooden huts, but on other occasions in tents, which were not altogether weather proof. Sister Gass clearly experienced at first hand both Flanders mud and the intense winter cold. She made extensive entries until early 1917 at which time two of her relatives were killed or died of wounds. Perhaps because of this or because of the intensity of her work, the entries then become less frequent and shorter.

The diary reveals some of Sister Gass's duties and the extent of casualties. She describes how she had to set up wards in tents, which were also not entirely weather proof, how she had to obtain stores and stock the ward. She did not enjoy night duty, which came round every three months, because she found it difficult to sleep in the daytime. There were days when nursing activities were slow and others when life was hectic, particularly during the periods of the major Allied offensives such as the Somme, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge. The matron of the Hospital, whose recollections are also included in the book's extensive appendices, quotes the total number of casualty admissions as 143,252 with 11,395 operations performed.

The book, which is edited by Susan Mann, contains not only the diary but also a useful introduction to the life of Clare Gass covering events before and after those recorded in the diary. In addition there are extensive notes and appendices. Overall the book contributes to a better understanding of the life of nursing sisters in the CAMC, and how they managed both away from the front line and close to it.

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**Jean Fernel**, *La Physiologie*, reprint of 1655 edition, ed. José Kany-Turpin, tr. Charles de Saint-Germain, Corpus des Oeuvres de Philosophie en Langue Française, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001, pp. 662, €52.00 (hardback).

Jean Fernel (1497–1558) was one of the foremost physicians of his Renaissance day, and wrote extensively on the full content of the medicine of the time. And on more than medicine, for he interested himself very seriously and very competently in, for instance, astronomy and the measuring of a degree of latitude. He wrote exclusively in Latin, which a century or so later was still being inculcated early into the children of the ambitious; for example, in Paris Guy Patin (1601–72) had his son Charles (1633–93) speaking and understanding Latin, so that before he was six years old he could speak it to the educated, and French to the household. So Charles said later, anyway. His father Guy declared Fernel to be one of his “Saints”, alongside Galen, and the best role model for his sons, who were thus early able to read him. But by that time not everyone was so well equipped. Hence in 1655, “pour ceux qui n’entendent pas la langue Latine”, Fernel’s *Physiologia* was published in a French translation of the original Latin publication of 1554, the only one of his works to be translated into French, and arguably his most important.

This translation has now been reprinted, a welcome development, and the reprint has been provided with a small number of notes and corrections. One of the notes (on p. 132) dismisses too summarily Fernel’s statement that images and spirits *emerge* through the pupil, rather than entering through it. A belief of this kind not only goes back at least to Plato’s *Timaeus*; it also addresses problems of visual physiology, even now incompletely solved (see Otto-Joachim Grüsser, ‘On the history of the ideas of efference copy and reafference’, in Claude Debru (ed.), *Essays in the history of the physiological sciences*, (Clio Medica 33)