

## Book Reviews

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JOYCE HEMLOW and others (editors), *The journals and letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, Volume VI, *France 1803–1812 Letters 550–631*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. vii, 469–892, illus., £13.50.

The data we use in constructing the history of disease and its treatment is derived mostly from the writings of medical men. From these we learn of the symptoms, signs, pathology, proposed etiology, prognosis and the therapy current at that time. However, it is rare to obtain information concerning the same items from a patient. There are, of course, many descriptions of disorders related by those afflicted who were articulate enough to record their experiences, but detailed accounts of pre-anaesthetic operations are very rare.

Fanny Burney (1752–1840) suffered from “. . . a very strong menace of inflammation upon the [right] breast . . .” (p. 475) in 1804 and from another “. . . Breast attack . . .” (p. 563) in 1806. In 1811 she began to suffer pain in the breast severe enough to prevent her using the right arm. She was treated palliatively in Paris by Baron Dominique-Jean Larrey (1766–1842), Napoleon’s famous battle surgeon, and Antoine Dubois (1756–1857), the leading French obstetrician, surgeon and anatomist of the day. As there was no response she was subjected to a mastectomy on 30 September 1811, and made a good recovery from it. This volume of her letters contains the one describing the details of pre-operative, operative and post-operative events (pp. 596–616), and as a graphic record of an operation it has few rivals. The letter, in common with the others, is edited with scrupulous editorial scholarship.

The question of diagnosis is of interest, because although the term cancer is used throughout, this pathology seems very unlikely on account of the long history of seven years, the prominence of pain as a presenting symptom, and her post-operative survival of twenty-nine years. It seems more likely that she was suffering from chronic mastitis.

All those concerned with the history of surgery, of anaesthetics and the history of early nineteenth-century French medicine should be aware of this remarkable case history. It would be worthwhile collecting together such accounts in order that the patient’s role in the history of medicine, which on the whole is woefully neglected, can be adequately represented.

M. ANTHONY HEWSON, *Giles of Rome and the medieval theory of conception. A study of the ‘De formatione corporis humani in utero’*, London, Athlone Press, 1975, 8vo, p. x, 268, illus., £10.00.

Giles of Rome (c. 1243–1316) was contemporary with Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Henry Ghent and other outstanding men. He was educated at the University of Paris and entered enthusiastically into the theological controversies of his time. Altogether he compiled probably 126 works, mostly in theology, philosophy, and political theory. However, he also wrote on physics, and about 1276 he composed the *De formatione*, which deals with theoretical human embryology. It was very influential in the late Middle Ages, but has not appeared in print since 1623. As Giles was a typical schoolman, seemingly entirely absorbed in his ecclesiastical