

Book Reviews

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

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activities, it seems strange that he should concern himself with this subject, and the reasons for his deviation are not given here. Be this as it may, little or no attention has been paid to Giles' biological interests. As so often happens, those who write biographies on this type of person conveniently overlook their scientific or medical contributions, as with Locke, Smollett, Tchekov, Schiller, and others. In the case of Giles, this is unjust, because his *De formatione*, which is almost devoid of theological content, stands at the beginning of the developing humanism and naturalism of the scientific renaissance. Its author as well as being a prominent theologian was one of the earliest medieval thinkers to investigate in detail an important aspect of human physiology, thereby showing more concern with human rather than with divine issues. But the interest of the work lies not so much in its medical content as in its critical investigation of a human problem in a new light. Although it is scholastic in form, it is nevertheless part of the early stages of the Scientific Revolution.

Mr. Hewson has, therefore, made an important contribution to the history of embryology by preparing an analysis of the book's main arguments, and by assessing its place in medieval literature. He begins with an account of Giles' life and writings, and then in three sections discusses in detail the contents of the *De formatione*. They deal in a critical fashion with the theoretical and philosophical aspects of conception and animation. Here he prefers the vitalistic ideas of Aristotle rather than those of Galen, but also introduces his own; the treatise is, in fact, essentially a defence of Aristotelian biology in general, and embryology in particular. The present author then proceeds to a consideration of the processes of development of the human foetus and membranes, and of multiple births, sex determination and hereditary resemblance. The penultimate chapter deals with the treatise in the eyes of later medieval writers such as Gentile da Forligno, Dino del Garbo and his son Thomas, and James of Forli.

Although Mr. Hewson shows at times a naïvety concerning medieval and medical history and of embryology, he has, nevertheless, produced an excellent and scholarly study of a topic important to the theological, medieval and medical historian. Throughout, he reveals a deep knowledge of the classical tradition and of medieval thought. His work is meticulously and copiously annotated, and there is an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources, as well as a detailed index. It should be essential reading for those studying medieval theology, philosophy and politics for now a more accurate assessment of Giles of Rome will be possible. Students of classical, medieval, and renaissance history of medicine, especially of reproduction, embryology and obstetrics, and of science, will find it invaluable. To all these, Mr. Hewson's book, tastefully produced by his publishers, can be recommended with confidence and enthusiasm.

WALTER SCHATZBERG, *Scientific themes in the popular literature and the poetry of the German Enlightenment, 1720–1760*, Berne, H. Lang, 1973, 8vo, pp. 349, S.Fr.58.

The author in his modified Ph.D. dissertation deals with the reception by men of letters of the sciences at a time when they were achieving early successes and still had humanistic roots. A number of these men had scientific interests, and it is of great importance to the historian of science to be aware through their writings of those