

## Book Reviews

a “renaissance” conception of the Earth as an animated, organic being “generating” its diurnal rotation, the tides, and living creatures through its own “essential activity”. Similarly, Hobbs rejected the attempts of many theorists of the Earth to make their accounts consistent with a literal interpretation of Genesis. In fact, the most remarkable aspect of this manuscript is its insistence that the formation of the Earth be explained by *natural* processes.

*The Earth generated and anatomized* was clearly the work of an intellectually isolated man, capable of making acute empirical observations and telling criticisms of other theories, but whose lack of a critical environment rendered his own theory too idiosyncratic to be of great interest to the intellectual élite of his time (it was snubbed by the Royal Society). To us, however, it is a valuable reminder that what the historian may see as the most significant ideas and works of a period are often thrust aside or even unknown to contemporaries.

The manuscript is carefully edited, and delightfully enlivened by the inclusion of those of Hobbs’s fine drawings which have survived and reconstructions of those which have been lost.

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MARY KEELE (editor), *Florence Nightingale in Rome. Letters written by Florence Nightingale in Rome in the winter of 1847–48*, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1981, 8vo, pp. xviii, 322, illus., \$12.00 (paperback).

In what turned out to be a year of revolutions in Europe, Florence Nightingale spent the winter in Rome with Mr. and Mrs. Bracebridge. An indefatigable letter-writer, she sent numerous letters home. Mary Keele has edited some fifty-five of these, wisely letting them speak for themselves, for although they are not *belles-lettres*, they have a vivid quality supported by the sharp intelligence and passion for facts that are so characteristic of Miss Nightingale’s later writing.

The letters are interesting on several counts. For the student of the revolutions they give a graphic eyewitness account of some events – one cannot say “unbiased”, because Florence longed to fire a pistol on behalf of the Risorgimento. Like Wordsworth before her, she clearly thought “what bliss it was that dawn to be alive” when Louis Philippe was overthrown. Second, the letters throw light on the education her father had given her; it was the typical classical education given to privileged boys of the time, well laced with philosophy and political history. Florence had absorbed this like a sponge, and it was one of the secrets of her success later; she could hold her own with educated men. It is for this reason, and because she was with well-informed friends, that her accounts of the Roman antiquities are so fascinating. For those interested in her work in reforming hospitals and nursing, her comments on the institutions she assiduously visited are revealing. Although at this time she was attracted to the Church of Rome, for the most part she found their hospitals unhygienic, the nuns overworked, and the patients miserable and uncared for, although praise is reserved for the sisters of St Vincent de Paul. At the age of twenty-seven, Florence Nightingale was already quite an authority on hospitals.

Perhaps most valuable is the fact that these letters help us to understand Florence Nightingale’s complex character as it was revealed in her later life. She is affectionate and enthusiastic and responds instinctively to goodness and sense, regardless of class or creed. While she is engaged on something in which she is interested, be it hospitals, Roman excavations, or the Sistine Chapel, her physical and mental energies are unbounded. However, with one or two notable exceptions, her enthusiasm is controlled by her intelligence, her sound classical education, and, above all, her sense of humour and of the ridiculous.

Florence slipped from French to Italian to the greatest of ease, and Mary Keele has provided a translation for every word. Some readers may find this excessive, but apart from this small cavil, the footnotes are scholarly and well researched.

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