

Book Reviews

Steno's inability to explain an affair of the soul such as pain in terms of the impact of matter reveals the dualist split between science and religion which makes itself increasingly perceptible at the time and seems to have troubled him fundamentally. Had earlier scientific men such as Harvey and Van Helmont been perhaps happier in their monist view of the world and of the 'working-matter' in which unification of biological science, teleology and belief had still been possible under the aspect of *philosophia naturalis*?

WALTER PAGEL

Mathias Mayor (1775–1847), by HANS GERSTER, Zürich, Juris Verlag, 1968, pp. 30, S.Fr. 6.

This small thirty-page pamphlet of excellent technical quality is Number 55 in a series of general medico-historical reviews edited by Professor E. H. Ackerknecht. It deals with the life and work of Mathias Mayor, who was surgeon to the Kantonspital, Lausanne, for forty-five years.

He was born in 1775, the eldest of six children. His father was a respected country doctor in Cudrefin in the Kanton Waadt. Mayor followed in his father's footsteps by qualifying in 1795 as M.D. Pavia, where he studied under Scarpa, after initial training in Zürich and Milan. In 1798 he broke a leg. This experience, not surprisingly, stimulated him to become a surgeon and to specialize—in modern parlance—as an orthopaedist.

In 1803 a new hospital was opened in Lausanne to which he was appointed surgeon. He remained there until 1847, when at the age of seventy-two years he died from obstructive jaundice.

His lifelong migraine is reflected in his meticulous and obsessional character. He was a keen and conscientious doctor who treated all his patients—whether private or public—alike, his usual routine being to make two or three visits to the hospital daily.

Surgeons are keen travellers, Mayor being no exception. He visited London in 1828 as guest of Astley Cooper. His family life was happy, although clouded by the death of his first wife and two of their four children. His son, Charles Mayor, succeeded him on his death.

Mayor wrote extensively on many topics and invented numerous surgical techniques and instruments which were refinements in his time and included a fracture-bed and a urinary sound. He was also the first to introduce cotton wool instead of lint as a wound dressing.

A short German translation of his prize-winning work—*Nouveau Système de Délégation Chirurgicale*, written in 1832, is appended. It deals largely with fractures and the correction of spinal deformity, and shows Mayor to be keenly aware of the importance of anatomy and physiology in surgery.

Few doctors anywhere can be accused of insularity nowadays. But this short biography of a little-known Swiss surgeon shows the high standard of medicine that could be achieved, even in the nineteenth century, in a small country at that time the prey of political instability and difficult communications.

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