

Book Reviews

Un grand Médecin et Biologiste, Casimir-Joseph Davaine (1812–1882), by JEAN THÉODORIDÈS (Analecta Medico-Historica, No. 4), Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1968, pp. 238, illus., £5.

This biography of Casimir-Joseph Davaine is the fruit of Dr. Théodoridès' long interest, extending back to 1955, in the life of this distinguished French scientist. Dr. Théodoridès has already published a dozen articles on various aspects of the life of Davaine, including one in this journal, in 1966, but this is the first full biography and it is not likely to be superseded.

Davaine qualified in 1837 and, although with a taste for scientific investigation, had first to obtain a secure livelihood from the practice of medicine. He established himself in the centre of Paris and became one of the most successful of medical practitioners with an appointment in the household of Napoleon III and patients in the highest social circles. At this time he was unmarried although, in 1845, he had a son by a young English woman whom he eventually married twenty-four years later. It seems that building up his practice allowed him little leisure for scientific work for, until 1850, he published almost nothing. However, from then until his death, in 1882, there were only two years that did not see some scientific communication by Davaine. Even during the siege of Paris, in 1871, when the Prussians had established a battery in the garden of his house at Garches and destroyed all his trees, he wrote a little book *Les éléments du bonheur* in which he described what he considered to be the essential elements of rational happiness.

Davaine is best known for his work on the aetiology of anthrax. He assisted his teacher P. F. O. Rayer who was the first to give an account of the bacillus, but more important were his own papers on the subject, published from 1863 onwards, which opened up the whole topic and stimulated work of the greatest importance for the germ theory as a whole. Davaine's other contributions to science were varied and important; he was a keen student of the parasitology of both animals and plants and, in 1860, published a most comprehensive work *Traité des entozoaires et des maladies vermineuses de l'homme et des animaux domestiques*. Teratology was another major interest and, in 1875, he reviewed the whole subject in an article of over 100 pages in Dechambre's great Dictionary. Of his many other scientific publications perhaps the most interesting from a medical point of view, were his observations on the blood leucocytes.

Considering the extent of Davaine's scientific work it is remarkable that he had no laboratory of his own and did most of his animal work at the house of a banker friend, Adolphe d'Eichthal.

Dr. Théodoridès' book covers all aspects of Davaine's life and work in a most interesting way and is based on a thorough study of all the available original sources, both printed and manuscript. It is surprising that no previous biography of so distinguished and attractive personality has been published but this gap in the literature of medical history has now been filled in an admirable way. The reviewer has but one adverse comment to make—this is a very expensive book for its size, and for £5, a hard cover might reasonably have been expected instead of a poor-quality paper one.

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