

Book Reviews

GEORGIUS PURKIRCHER, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Miloslaus Okál, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum, new series, vol. 10, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, 8vo, pp. 255, £11.00.

Despite the existence of substantial biography, written in Hungarian in 1941, Georgius Purkircher (c. 1533–77) has never been a name to conjure with. He is known, if at all, only for a long poem on the anniversary of the death of Melanchthon, his erstwhile teacher at Wittenberg. This new edition of the poems and letters of this doctor from Bratislava will, it is hoped, ensure a wider audience for his humanist learning.

The medical historian will here find three main topics of interest. Purkircher's Latin poems are filled with medical data. He writes on plague and, in gruesome detail, on the illnesses that carried off friends and family. Secondly, his letters from Padua, where he studied medicine from 1561 until the end of 1563, are full of unusual sidelights on his teachers, his courses, and his life as a student. He comments bitterly on the chaos of 1562–3, when the sudden deaths of Fallopio and Landi in quick succession almost ended medical teaching. Replacements were hard to find, and Professor Trincavelli's failing memory became a student joke. Finally, Purkircher was one of the many medical men with an interest in botany who communicated their findings, seeds as well as ideas, in a network of correspondence that linked Italy with Belgium, and Germany with furthest Hungary. Guilandini, Matthioli, Crato, Clusius, and Camerarius were on familiar terms with Purkircher, who once also acted as a marriage-broker for Hugo Blotius, the historian and librarian of the Imperial court at Vienna. In his own lifetime, then, Purkircher was a far from negligible figure, among European learned physicians as well as in his native Bratislava. This edition of his writings explains why.

Vivian Nutton
Wellcome Institute

JOHANNES OEHME, *Das Kind im 18. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte des Kindes*, with contributions by Helmuth Albrecht, Ulrich Herrmann, Urte von Kortzfleisch and Gerhard Trommer, Documenta Paediatrica 16, Lübeck, Hansisches Verlagkontor, 1988, 8vo, pp. 132, illus., DM 24.00.

The major contributor to *Das Kind im 18. Jahrhundert*, Johannes Oehme, has much to tell, maybe too much. The book was apparently prepared according to the formula, a bit about everything, but only a bit. On the other hand, the volume is ordered with rigour and clarity and this, with an excellent bibliography after every chapter, makes it not only useful, but entertaining and well written too. No need for anyone with shaky German to fear difficulty with the language here.

The book mostly treats, if not healthy children, then at least children who are not ill. It is, as the subtitle suggests, a social history, one with a strongly medical flavour, but its subjects will interest others than doctors and educationalists.

The authors discuss education from various points of view: 'Schulbildung im 18. Jahrhundert', 'Kinderarbeit und Industrieschule', 'Findelkinder und Waisen', and 'Physische und moralische Erziehung'. Ulrich Herrmann has written a most interesting and suggestive chapter about the child and the family. His thesis, that generational conflicts are grounded in the family pattern which arose at the end of the eighteenth century, when care for children developed into strict control, should be read by all parents. Oehme's chapter, 'Kindesmisshandlung und Kindesmord im 18. Jahrhundert', is most depressing. Although Oehme cannot hide his indignation, he does not forget to explain the reasons for the encroachments against children, which in many cases were grounded in social circumstances and ignorance. Another fascinating chapter is by the same author, on infant prodigies. The phenomenon was discussed and debated in the eighteenth century, but, surprisingly, no one seems to doubt the accounts of these indeed advanced children who could write a history book at the age of three and speak Latin and foreign languages as babies. The accounts of their physical development are suggestive: the description of the life of "das Lübeckische Wunderkind" makes me think of the symptoms of anorexia.

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One philosopher is constantly referred to: J. J. Rousseau, author of *Emile, or on education* (1762). His influence on eighteenth-century educationalists is mentioned in several chapters. Even so, the practical consequences, touched upon in Gerhard Trommer's chapter on 'Philanthropische Erziehung', deserve more attention. How were the famous principles applied, or not, in private homes?

All the contributors are eager to draw parallels between the eighteenth century and today; and Oehme hopes that we can learn from history. However, the book left this reviewer with the more pessimistic feeling that our society is not particularly friendly to children; and that modern effort and knowledge cannot prevent the mistakes and crimes that are committed against them. Oehme has an immense knowledge and understanding of the history of children and his wish to see that history in the light of our own times makes this book most relevant and worth reading.

Karin Kryger
National Museum, Denmark

PATRIZIA GUARNIERI, *L'ammazzabambini: legge e scienza in un processo toscano di fine ottocento*, Microstorie 15, Turin, Einaudi, 1988, 8vo, pp. vii, 225, illus., L. 22,000.

Between 1873 and 1875 four children disappeared at Incisa Valdarno, a Tuscan village, without leaving any sign. Finally the mystery was solved: Carlo Grandi, a 24-year-old cartwright, living in the village, was caught while beating a young boy and on the point (apparently) of killing him. The corpses of the four missing children were found buried in Grandi's workshop. The quick investigation, which easily gained the confession of the alleged assassin and led to his indictment, the course of the trial up to the verdict, and the immediate medical and legal reactions to the conviction are the subjects of Patrizia Guarnieri's book.

The action against Carlo Grandi is one of the numerous "insanity trials" of this period in Europe as well as in America. As in the case studied by Charles Rosenberg (1968), it marks one of the first appearances in court of scientists debating upon the state of mental illness or sanity of the defendant and then upon his responsibility for the crime. But in this case, the physical deficiencies of the defendant (a dwarf, crippled, with twenty-one toes, completely hairless) seemed to provide an ideal ground for speculations about somatic signs of mental illness. The whole action was thus very little concerned with questioning and proving Grandi's guilt. Rather, it became a battleground for different definitions of madness: apparently the opposition was between an older conception of mental illness, conceived as a lack of any intellectual and rational faculty, and a modern idea of "moral insanity", which implied uncontrolled and unmotivated (even if not irrational) behaviour, often the expression of heredity or somatic malformations. But, Guarnieri points out, it would be misleading to view the clash in court as a mirror of the actual terms of scientific dispute. Through a careful reconstruction of the Florentine intellectual setting, the author shows the distance between the positions taken in court and those taken in medical and in legal cultures. Despite the psychological approach to the study of madness prevailing in Tuscany, where the deterministic developments occurring in France and in some Italian circles (namely Lombroso) received sharp criticism, the medical witnesses professed a rigid organicism at the trial. Likewise, the behaviour of the magistrates seems incompatible with the advanced interpretation of personal responsibility, based on a broad concept of freedom of choice and awareness, shared in Tuscan legal practice. The book underlines, then, the dependence of ideas and scientific views on political dynamics: in this case, the opinions showed in court were heavily shaped by the struggle to assert the status of psychiatry and to establish, over magistrates and mere physicians, the authority of alienists to evaluate criminal responsibility.

But besides the explanations it proposes, Guarnieri's book is notable for its ability to suggest that "other" circumstances, which will remain widely unknown, contributed to give that twist to the story. The narrative dwells on the different social actors involved in the construction of the accusation (the various witnesses, the examining magistrate, the defendant himself), tracing a profile of them which, without trying to be complete, clearly suggests the complexity of reasons