

Book Reviews

The medico-historical element is well represented by Professor Alexander, whose other publications in this field complement the present work. Three main categories emerge: Catherine's own health and approach to medicine; medical reforms, hospitals, and smallpox inoculation; and the Moscow Plague of 1770–2. In view of her known scepticism of medical theory and practice and the dearth of documentary material, the author has resourcefully portrayed her attitudes towards health and sickness, her emotional and physical crises. His more expanded treatment of medicine at Catherine's court in V. Nutton (ed.), *Medicine at the courts of Europe* (1989) provides a useful supplement. A succinct account is given of Catherine's important role in reforming the Medical Chancery into the Medical Collegium in November 1763, leading to radical changes which also exempted court medical practitioners from the Collegium's jurisdiction. The episode of Dr Thomas Dimsdale's inoculation of Catherine and her son Paul for smallpox in St Petersburg in October 1768 is also handled dexterously and placed in context. But possibly the greatest medical interest attaches to the virulent Moscow Plague of 1770–2, subheaded here 'The pestilential distemper', and 'The plague riot' that resulted from Muscovites' dissatisfaction with the imposition of compulsory quarantines, a subject which is graphically described along with Catherine's reactions. Sensibly, a separate chapter is devoted to 'Nymphomania? Favorites and Favoritism' and an epilogue to the 'Legend of Catherine the Great'—of good value in themselves.

Professor Alexander's authoritative book is very well researched, organized, paced and written. Balanced, it combines a judicious blend of narrative and commentary. On the whole he succeeds admirably in his aims and in bringing Catherine to life, although some items, perforce, are too condensed for easy assimilation. Readers of *Medical History* will find this biography of Catherine the Great makes excellent reading.

John H. Appleby, Norwich

GUNTER MANN and FRANZ DUMONT (eds.), *Gehirn-Nerven-Seele: Anatomie und Physiologie im Umfeld S. Th. Soemmerrings*, Soemmerring-Forschungen III, Veröff. d. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz), Stuttgart and New York, Gustav Fischer, 1988, 8vo, pp. 473, illus., DM 124.00.

The one book that probably did more than any other to narrow our perception of the gap between man and the anthropoid apes was T. H. Huxley's *Man's place in nature* (1863). It is well known that Huxley's theory of human evolution was inspired by Darwin; less well known, however, is that *Man's place in nature* was the outcome of a controversy with Richard Owen who, unlike Huxley, tried to widen the gap between apes and humans by placing the latter in a separate sub-class, the *Archencephala*, defined on the basis of certain features of the human brain. Also less well known is that the Huxley-Owen clash had its contemporaneous parallel in Germany, in a conflict between the materialist Karl Vogt and the physiologist-cum-spiritist Rudolf Wagner. The hope of Wagner and many others was to find an indication in the human brain of the spiritual nature of *homo sapiens*. Wagner's trophy in his "soul-searching" endeavour was the brain of the famous Göttingen mathematician J. K. F. Gauss, donated by Gauss jun. to anatomical science. Wagner's *Der Kampf um die Seele* (1875) or Emil Huschke's *Schädel, Hirn und Seele* (1854) are just two of many publications, the titles of which exemplify the tremendous interest which existed in the study of human and simian neuro-anatomy and -physiology because of the search for criteria of human uniqueness.

As the most logical starting point for this fascinating early- and mid-nineteenth century debate about the brain, one could take Samuel Thomas Sömmerring's booklet *Das Organ der Seele* (1796), in which he speculated that the seat of a *sensorum commune* is the intraventricular cerebrospinal fluid. Gunter Mann and Franz Dumont are to be congratulated for having chosen "brain, nerves, and soul" as the subject matter for this third volume of Sömmerring-Forschungen and for having put together this fine collection of 16 contributions. The subject of Sömmerring's doctoral thesis, *De basi encephali originibusque nervorum cranio egressantium* (1778) started him off on his chief area of expertise, namely neuro-anatomy. His interest in the

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human nervous system led to a major series of treatises on the sense organs. The present volume throws new light on Sömmerring's neuro-anatomical work, and at the same time places it against a wide panoramic backdrop of Sömmerring's interaction with "forerunners", with successors such as Albert von Kölliker, and with contemporary friends and colleagues like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Johann Foster, Goethe, Justus Christian von Loder, Johann Christian Reil, and the brother Joseph and Karl Wenzel. Based on the dissection of literally hundreds of human and animal brains, the latter two established a European reputation in cerebral anatomy which lasted well into the years of the Huxley-Owen and Vogt-Wagner clash. Of particular interest to the intellectual and social historian are the essays on Gall, phrenology, and the fear of materialism instilled by research on cerebral localization.

A shortcoming of this valuable and beautifully-produced volume is that it lacks an introductory essay in which the rich variety of historical topics could have been integrated and discussed under the headings of a few common themes.

Nicholas Rupke, Wolfson College, Oxford

MARTIN WEBER, *Georg Christian Gottlieb Wedekind 1761–1831: Werdegang und Schicksal eines Arztes im Zeitalter der Aufklärung und der Französischen Revolution, mit einem Anhang: Wedekinds Diätetikvorlesung von 1789/90*, Soemmerring-Forschungen IV, Veröff. d. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz), Stuttgart and New York, Gustav Fischer, 1988, 8vo, pp. 465, illus., DM 128.00.

MANFRED WENZEL (ed.), *Goethe und Soemmerring: Briefwechsel 1784–1828*, Soemmerring-Forschungen V, Veröff. d. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz), Stuttgart and New York, Gustav Fischer, 1988, 8vo, pp. 179, illus., DM 58.00.

With Weber's *Wedekind* the Soemmerring-Forschungen present a biography of one of Samuel Thomas Soemmerring's Mainz colleagues. Georg Wedekind was appointed physician-in-ordinary to Elector Friedrich Karl Joseph in 1787; in the same year, the latter got Wedekind's nomination as associate professor accepted by the reluctant medical faculty. When, however, the *Mainzer Republik* was proclaimed in 1792, Wedekind left electoral service, becoming a founder and, with Georg Forster, one of the most active members of the local Jacobin Club. After fifteen years as a French military surgeon, he again became a personal physician, to the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt, holding this post until his death in 1831. In 1809 the former Jacobin was even raised to the peerage.

Rich in contrast, the course of this life has induced earlier historians to charge Wedekind with blatant opportunism. Drawing upon new sources, such as material from the family archives and the Paris Archives de la Guerre, Weber's biography helps to correct this judgement. Analysing Wedekind's motives, Weber admits him to be driven by ambition. Yet it is also shown that throughout his life Wedekind felt deeply obliged to the ideals of the Enlightenment and was receptive to liberal ideas. Weber makes clear that the physician to the Mainz Elector never fully adapted himself to court life. Furthermore Wedekind is portrayed as enthusiastically enlightening the public on medical matters. This is particularly illustrated by the lecture on dietetics which he gave to numerous listeners of all classes in 1789–90 and which Weber has edited as an appendix to his book. Such contemporary issues as smallpox inoculation, as well as the classical six *res non naturales* found their way into this popular lecture.

It is a pity that the wealth of source material made Weber close his very readable biography with Wedekind's move to Darmstadt in 1808, all the more since almost half of Wedekind's 145 medical and political publications—as listed in the personal bibliography at the end of the book—appeared later.

Though Soemmerring's opinion of Wedekind is only hinted at by Weber, it certainly was not a high one. Soemmerring was antipathetic towards the French Revolution—as was his friend Goethe. The surviving correspondence between these two, covering the years 1784 to 1828, has now been edited by Wenzel in the fifth volume of the Soemmerring-Forschungen. It consists of