

Book Reviews

Although Spalding is incisive about such institutional developments and clear about the college's response to such major national changes in medical education as the impact of the 1910 Flexner report, he often overlooks opportunities to underscore the distinctively southern character of the education at MCG. For example, although he remarks upon the many kinship ties that joined generations of faculty at the college, he tends to dismiss these as mere nepotism. Yet such ties in the family-conscious South were an important (and seldom studied) feature of medical training and institutional life. Similarly, Spalding notes the admission of the first two Black students to MCG in 1967, but offers little perspective on the college's particular contribution to the 150 years of race relations bridged by this study. Readers are left to wonder about the extent to which Black people—as patients, experimental subjects, or alternative healers—were involved in the development of MCG. Finally, this is not a study that has much to say about a medical college as a place of learning and healing. For all of his attention to changes in deans and struggles for money and image, Spalding does not concern himself with what went on in the lectures and laboratories, nor does he characterize how students and faculty brought their medicine to the sick people who called upon them.

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F. L. M. PATTISON, *Granville Sharp Pattison: anatomist and antagonist 1791–1851*, Edinburgh, Canongate, 1987, 8vo, pp. xiv, 284, illus., £12.95.

The “antagonist” of the subtitle says it all. For Granville Pattison, the anatomist who kept a pair of pistols displayed on his desk, seems to have lived a life (in his great-great-nephew's telling) of duels, dissolution, and perennial exile. The author bases his tragicomic story on the pamphlet wars Pattison engaged in wherever he went. And he went almost everywhere, a kind of anatomical Cain, “with a curse upon his forehead”, wandering in self-imposed exile from city to city. As a young anatomy lecturer in his native Glasgow, he was indicted for body snatching at twenty-three, accused of malpractice at twenty-six, and hounded from the city after his affair with Andrew Ure's wife. He moved to Philadelphia, where he made more enemies; Baltimore was no better, for he ended up duelling and brawling. And so to London University in 1827, where student accusations of incompetence led to such scenes of riot that he was sacked. From there it was off to Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1831 (where he generously gave himself an MD) and finally to New York University and another chair a decade later, trailing bad feelings and bankruptcy, waiting for the wagging finger of Presbyterian censure.

Dr Pattison's account of his distant relative is certainly not marred by the usual filial devotion. It is a history of sharp practice and short friendships, with adultery scenes as gory as the attempts to disguise resurrected bodies. Not so much warts and all; it is almost all warts, necessarily so when little else survives but the newspaper headlines. Yet Pattison's achievements do come through: he helped to found the Glasgow Medical Society and to establish the Baltimore Infirmary, and his stature in America as a lecturer grew in his later years. He was unquestionably a pedestrian anatomist and pugnacious man, yet some of his difficulties—of obtaining cadavers, obeying medical etiquette, and satisfying honour—were symptomatic of the age. Dr Pattison's biography is, if anything, kept at too personal a level. For example, we get barely a glimpse of the substantive issue behind the London University fracas: Pattison's hatred of the Parisian theoretical anatomy which his rivals were teaching, and which the tricolour-waving students preferred. The radical Thomas Wakley called Pattison “a bad anatomist and a still worse man”. But given the context at the time of the July Revolution, we can understand Wakley's, and the students', French preferences. Pattison's predicament in 1830, at least, was due as much to circumstances as crankiness.

By concentrating on the mechanics of the disputes, however, Dr Pattison has been able to draw a vivid picture of personal honour and misplaced conduct, of pistols for two and coffee for one. In short he has produced a no-holds-barred biography of a difficult man in a difficult age.

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