Conversations with Harvey

GWENETH WHITTERIDGE

For this book the author has used the device of a "journal," supposed to have been written by Harvey on various occasions from 1 April 1647, Harvey's 69th birthday, to 20th June 1654, three years before his death on 3 June 1657. In each section the author recounts in retrospect some incident of Harvey's life or some contemporary happening in England or the Continent. Apart from certain periods when no information concerning Harvey's whereabouts or his doings is now known to exist, Harvey's life is reasonably well documented and, being aware of this, Dr Hamburger says that he has been careful to make no mistake in the narrative. The only liberty he has taken is to fill the gaps from his own imagination.

As a result, the book which he has written is neither a straightforward biography nor a novel. It is a mixture of fact and fiction of a kind now commonly called "faction." For such a work to succeed the imaginary sections must be convincing; they must convey the personality of Harvey in such a way that he is recognisably the same man as the William Harvey who reveals his own personality in his own writings. Furthermore, no thought or idea alien to the seventeenth century ought to be attributed either to Harvey or to his interlocutors. This is a difficult task and one in which Dr Hamburger is not entirely successful.

Harvey's "Sharpnesse of Wit and Brightnesse of mind," to which Sir Samuel Garth referred in his Harveian Oration of 1697 and which he compared to "a light darted from Heaven" that "has illuminated the whole learned world," is scarcely discernible. Given Harvey's modesty and freedom from pride ("Had he been stiffe, proud, starcht and retired, as other formal Doctors are, he had known no more than they," wrote his friend John Aubrey), it seems unlikely that he would have said, even at the end of his life, "La circulation du sang, désormais, c'est William Harvey" (p 276: From now on the circulation of the blood is William Harvey), or, referring to the patients in St Bartholomew's Hospital: "Après tout, ces miséreux avaient pour médecin le médecin ordinaire du Roi" (p 223: After all, these miserable wretches had the Physician in Ordinary to the King as their physician).

Seeing that Harvey's unfailing courtesy and his tolerance towards his opponents is well known, and that in an age when controversy was frequently spiced by gross abuse, he is scarcely likely to have said: "Puissent les feux de l'enfer brûler tous les jaloux qui cherchent, par envie, à détruire mon oeuvre" (p 776: May the flames of Hell consume the jealous who out of envy seek to destroy my work), or, when speaking of Riolan: "Je lui mettrai le nez dans ses erreurs" (p 256: I'll stick his nose into his mistakes). When he wrote to Paul Marquand Slegel in 1651, Harvey said of Riolan: "For the sake of the old friendship subsisting between us . . . I cannot find it in my heart to say anything severe of Riolan."

Various small errors of fact seem to have eluded the author's attention. Harvey did not study law as well as medicine in Padua (p 21). There is no evidence whatsoever to show that Harvey met Galileo in Padua and the suggestion that he first thought of the circulation as a student in Padua is contradicted by his lecture notes of 1616 and their later corrections. There is good reason to suppose that Harvey saw a severe epidemic of bubonic plague in London before he journeyed into Europe with the Earl of Lennox in 1630. In May 1603, when Harvey was first examined by the College of Physicians, plague was already present in the City of London and by the end of the year had accounted for 33 347 deaths. There was a further major outbreak in 1625, when deaths totalled more than 41 000 in a population which then amounted to about 300 000. Neither of these epidemics could possibly be described as an outbreak which

killed "quelques pauvres bougres sans affoler les populations" (p 83: a few poor devils without causing any alarm among the population in general).

Dr Hamburger has imagined meetings and conversations between Harvey and many different people, including among others Robert Fludd, Thomas Hobbes, Marin Mersenne in

Will hospitals affected by the current cuts end up begging for funds with similar desperate jokiness? Appearing on the back of the 1910 annual report of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary, this appeal must have worked, for the hospital flourished, reaching its 100th anniversary last year. *Cardiff Royal Infirmary 1883-1983* by Arnold S Aldis (University of Wales Press; £2.95) is a detailed and affectionate account of the life of this vigorous centenarian.

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France and Thomas Burton at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Some of these encounters seem more probable than others, but the only criterion by which they should be judged is their relevance to the portrayal of the character of Harvey. Unfortunately, neither in the purported relations with other people, nor in the imagined soliloquies is there any sudden spark to reveal a deep and intuitive understanding of William Harvey and to show him in an unexpected flood of light so that the reader may apprehend the very essence of the man. By recounting Harvey's life in retrospect the author has neither conveyed the excitement of

Harvey's discovery of the circulation nor his frustration and dejection over his failure to find the secrets of generation. It should not be forgotten that the investigation of Nature was the one consuming passion of Harvey's life, for he was of the opinion that thereby "we might acquire not only the knowledge of the lesser secrets of Nature but some adumbration of the great Creator himself."

For a straightforward account of Harvey's life, which is by no means easy to reconstruct from random recollections,

English readers should look at the biography written by Sir Geoffrey Keynes. Those who want to know something of the man, should turn to John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* and to Harvey's own writings, particularly his less well known *Dissertation on the Generation of Animals*, for of all his published works this is the most personal and wide ranging.

Le Journal d'Harvey. Jean Hamburger. (Pp 339; £9.35.) Flammarion. 1983.

Cardiological salad bowl

DAVID DE BONO

Scientific Foundations of Cardiology has 94 contributors in addition to the two editors, and it is aimed at both cardiologists and general physicians. A series of self contained essays, the chapters are grouped so as to begin with cellular mechanisms and then to proceed through a discussion of "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" mechanisms of control to more clinical aspects of cardiology.

The "basic science" chapters are accurate and informative, with some variation in the level at which they are pitched. I would have appreciated better continuity between these and the more clinically oriented chapters later in the book, perhaps in the form of an editorial "comment." The extent to which lessons learnt from the animal experiments described could reasonably be applied to clinical problems is not always made clear. In the clinical chapters the range of subjects covered is rather eclectic. There is a superb 70 page section on hypertensive heart disease, as one would expect from the interests and reputation of the editors. Ischaemic heart disease is dealt with in 90 pages, some of them excellent, others a bit woolly. There is very little on tachyarrhythmias (though more on conduction defects and pacing), and valvular heart disease gets short shrift apart from a succinct chapter by Gunning on the choice of replacement heart valves. Paediatric cardiology is not amenable to compression into 30 pages, though the standard of illustration here is good. Cardiomyopathy, on the other hand, gets 40 pages and is dealt with authoritatively. The section on specialised investigation includes a good technical account of ambulatory electrocardiographic monitoring, a general discussion of nuclear cardiology, precordial exercise ECG mapping, and a very thorough discussion by Rajagopalan of measurement of cardiac output in man.

The editors state that they encouraged their contributors to be didactic, and different contributors have interpreted this in various ways, with reference lists ranging from zero to 20 or more references a chapter. I thought that the most successful chapters were those that based their argument on carefully selected, well presented, and well documented original data. Some contributors seemed confused whether "scientific" meant that which was studied in preclinical laboratories or that which resulted from the application of scientific methods.

Certainly this is no ordinary textbook, but I find it difficult to know how best to classify it. Sometimes I felt that I was reading two books at once—a kind of "recent advances" collection of cardiological essays on one hand, and a grown up physiology textbook on the other. I have enjoyed reading it and have learnt a lot from it, but I would not recommend it as a comprehensive reference or for guidance in the management of an actual clinical problem—it does not, for example, compete with Braunwald's *Heart Disease—a Textbook of Cardiovascular Medicine*, nor was it, I am sure, intended to. Perhaps it would be best to regard it as a kind of cardiological salad bowl—fun to dip into and good for your health—or more seriously as a set of postgraduate lectures from the best of which one may emerge with some concepts clarified, some preconceptions demolished, and lots of new questions to ask.

Scientific Foundations of Cardiology. Ed Peter Sleight and John Vann Jones. (Pp 540; £50.) William Heinemann Medical Books. 1983.

A stimulating disease

MICHAEL N MARSH

Celiac sprue disease has stimulated the minds of many physicians throughout this century. This book by Cooke and Holmes is a noteworthy addition to the existing publications on the subject and is a timely reminder of the considerable interest that still underlies the quest to unravel the pathogenesis of this intriguing disorder.

The 13 chapters cover all aspects of coeliac disease, from its historical beginnings, through mucosal abnormalities, clinical and metabolic features, and treatment to its varied complications and other associations, ending with a consideration of the related disorder dermatitis herpetiformis, and a final assault on immunology

and aetiology. Each chapter is well referenced and followed by a detailed bibliography; indeed, this is one of the major strengths of the book, for it provides extensive coverage of most that has been written since Gee's classic paper of 1888.

The introductory history certainly fulfils the authors' hope that much "early work containing so much truth will not be forgotten." This account will be read widely by many future thesis writers, for it contains extensive background material for the "statutory literature review."

The contributions on clinical presentation, metabolic dis-