

Book Reviews

Sir Thomas Browne. A Biographical and Critical Study, by FRANK LIVINGSTONE HUNTLEY, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1962, pp. x, 283, \$1.50.

The last decade has seen a reappraisal of Sir Thomas Browne's merits both as literary artist and as 'philosopher', the term including his attitude to science and religion. For many years he suffered from his discovery by Coleridge and Charles Lamb as a writer of quaint conceits. Recently critics have been increasingly appreciative of his outstanding literary art as well as of the part he played in the scientific awakening of the seventeenth century, though there have been few books containing serious studies of the varied aspects of his achievement. Now an excellent volume has appeared by Professor Frank Huntley of the University of Michigan.

Professor Huntley's book is both biographical and critical, though it concentrates on the facts of Browne's early life rather than on the years of his later fame. His life as a doctor in Norwich does not, indeed, provide much of interest in the relation; it was the formative years during his education and travels that are more important. Professor Huntley spent a year in England investigating his sources as far as possible on the spot, and this has given a pleasing air of reality to his pages with a presentation of a living man instead of a remote scholar writing three centuries ago. Obviously it would not be easy to reconstruct a portrait of Browne, the Winchester schoolboy; nevertheless a lively picture emerges from these pages, followed by an illuminating account of the enormously important part played by religion in Browne's world when he was a young man. He was to prove himself a pioneer in the difficult reconciliation of science and religion, and Professor Huntley has brought out clearly how successfully Browne lived in two worlds at once, earning in recent times the name of The Great Amphibium, given him by Dr. Joseph Needham, who in 1934 did tardy justice to Browne's work as biochemist and experimental biologist.

Medical education in England in the early seventeenth century was totally inadequate for anyone aspiring to be a good doctor, and Browne, after leaving Oxford, spent four important years learning his profession on the Continent, mainly in the Universities of Montpellier, Padua and Leiden, probably with visits to other centres such as Vienna. It seems that anatomical lectures at Oxford even as late as 1665 still made no mention of Harvey and the circulation of the blood, so that the necessity for a more enlightened education abroad was paramount. It was at Montpellier in Languedoc in southern France that Browne received his most indelible impressions, the great physician, Riverius, providing authoritative instruction in medicine, while welcome relaxation was to be had in enjoyment of the arts of painting, poetry and music. Browne received his M.D. degree at Leiden in 1633, but his thesis has been lost and there is no certain knowledge even of its subject.

Professor Huntley, after his account of Browne's education in medicine and science, examines closely the question of whether he can truly be regarded as a 'scientist', asking three crucial questions: 1. Did Browne accept the scientific method? 2. To what extent was he willing to surrender theological positions in order to accept new scientific theories? 3. Did he look upon research not only as a means of advancement of material welfare, but also as an end in itself? He concludes that in the wider sense given to *scientia* in Browne's time he would certainly qualify as a scientist, the evidence being found particularly in his great book, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, familiarly known as *Browne's Vulgar Errors*, first published in 1646.

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Browne returned from his Continental travels in December 1633, aged twenty-eight, and it is still uncertain where he then settled for his medical apprenticeship. Professor Huntley is critical of the evidence that he lived at Upper Shibden Hall, near Halifax, and in fact concludes that it is worthless. He thinks that it is more likely that the young doctor worked for two years somewhere in Oxfordshire, and that it was there that he wrote his most famous work, *Religio Medici*. Browne clearly had close friends in Halifax, and it was probably to John Power, a merchant of Multure Hall near Halifax, that he addressed this piece of intimate self revelation. Professor Huntley very properly makes a fresh and close study of *Religio Medici*, seeking to rescue Browne from the critics who dismiss him as a negligible thinker. He remarks that it was Walter Pater who said that 'what really tells in this book is the witness Browne brings to men's instinct for survival, to their intimations of immortality'. He then analyses Browne's attitude to Christian doctrines, his conception of God and his leanings towards the old cosmology, his belief in angels and the devil, and his view of death, of which he was more ashamed than afraid, since long living hardly improves our natures. He isolates as of special significance Browne's view of his duties as a scholar: 'To this (as calling myself a scholar) I am obliged by the duty of my condition; I make not therefore my head a grave, but a treasure of knowledge; I intend no Monopoly, but a community of learning; I study not for my own sake only, but for theirs that study not for themselves.' This is typical of his care for mankind, as also of his love for the friend for whom he was writing. Browne's passages on friendship are famous and are part of his belief in harmony both between God and man, and man and man.

Professor Huntley disclaims any intention of reopening the well-worn discussion of Browne as a stylist; nevertheless he makes interesting remarks on some of his stylistic uses of language, particularly his innumerable 'doublets', that is, using two words with almost the same meaning when one would do, his use of rising and falling sentences forming, as it were, a metabolic style (alternating anabolism and catabolism), and his frequent use of metaphors. He holds that many of Browne's metaphors are 'stylistic flourishes' such as Browne enjoyed using, but claims that his numerous philosophical metaphors are important because of the conceptual complexes that they contain. This is an important argument against those who regard Browne as a stylist without depth of thought. Even Coleridge admitted that he had brains in his head and that *Religio Medici* 'paints certain parts of my moral and intellectual being better than any other book I have ever met with—and the style throughout is delicious'.

Browne's longest book, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, is seldom read in its entirety today; it is supposed to be a book for browsing. Nevertheless it was a best-seller in its time, and Professor Huntley claims that 'though partially a hodgepodge of quaint opinion' it is nevertheless 'a monument to Browne's genius and passion for truth'. Among other things the book demonstrates clearly Browne's belief in the experimental method, particularly in relation to biology, an area of science closest to his profession, and his delight in natural history. A man emerges from this great work who is memorable for his writing, charitable in his opinion, humorous and devout. He was also an important coiner of words, and most readers will be surprised to learn that among scores of others he invented *antediluvian*, *hallucination*, *insecurity*, *incontrovertible*, *precarious*, *literary*, *retrogression*, *electricity* and *medical*. The humour in *Vulgar Errors* is so pervasive that the whole huge canvas turns out to be 'a vast ironic comedy', while yet the book remained the work of a devoutly humble inquirer after truth.

From the point of view of literary detection Professor Huntley's chapter on the lesser known work, *A Letter to a Friend upon the Occasion of the Death of his Intimate Friend* is one of the most interesting. This relatively short book must seem to many medical

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men the supreme example of literary artistry applied to a clinical theme. It dwells on the character and death of a young man who died of phthisis and is written in the form of a letter to the patient's older friend. It was not published until 1690, eight years after the author's death, and has been assumed to be almost his last work. The treatise is obviously founded on fact, but the identities of the patient and his friend have never been convincingly determined. Professor Huntley demonstrated in a paper published in 1951 and now again in this book that the patient was Robert Loveday, a brilliant young man who published a translation of Calpreriède's *Cléopâtre* as *Hymen's Præluudia*, or *Love's Master-piece* in 1652. He died in 1656; he belonged to a Norfolk family, and had certainly been a patient of Browne's. The older friend was Sir John Pettus, also a Norfolk worthy, well known to Browne and an authority on mines. Pater had divined many years before that the *Letter* was related in theme to Browne's more famous *Hydriotaphia, or Urne Buriall*, 1658, to which it is a song of prelude, but only now does Professor Huntley show with convincing details that this suggestion is correct, and that the *Letter* cannot have been composed later than 1657. It was certainly revised at later intervals, but could not be published until after the death of Sir John Pettus which took place in 1689. Dr. Edward Browne, the author's son, then promptly had it printed and it was published in 1690. The only serious discrepancy is that the patient of the *Letter* died in May, whereas the actual Loveday died in December. This may, however, be allowed to be a literary device, since Browne's chosen date afforded him astrological overtones which suited his purpose. Professor Huntley's elucidation of this long-standing puzzle is a major contribution to literary history and adds interest to a work which is one of the most remarkable instances of Browne's stylistic artistry.

Hydriotaphia and *The Garden of Cyrus*, published together in 1658, have been regarded by most critics as essentially unrelated and they have wondered why they appeared together in one cover. The first is prized as one of the finest pieces of sonorous prose in the English language. The second is dismissed as the acme of Browne's tendency to unbridled quaintness. But Professor Huntley has no difficulty in showing that the juxtaposition was a deliberate contrasting of related themes—death and life, ignorance and knowledge, darkness and light. The famous 'organ peal' of the concluding paragraphs of *Hydriotaphia* is universally admired; equal admiration may be paid to the lovely passages at the end of *The Garden of Cyrus*. In the one 'the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy'; in the other we are reminded that 'the Quincunx of Heaven runs low, and 'tis time to close the five ports of knowledge'. Browne's artistry runs like a thread through the whole wondrous tapestry, and we have to rub our eyes and remember that he, more than any other writer in the seventeenth century, related not only religion, but also art, with science. Professor Huntley's book is both scholarly and humane and is just the kind of tribute to Sir Thomas Browne that his admirers will most value and enjoy.

GEOFFREY KEYNES

From Farriery to Veterinary Medicine, 1785–1795, by L. P. PUGH, Cambridge, W. Heffer & Sons, 1962, pp. 178, illus., 30s.

The appearance of a book dealing with any aspect of the history of veterinary medicine is such a rare event that if only for this reason the publication of *From Farriery to Veterinary Medicine* is to be welcomed. The story unfolded by Professor Pugh is, however, so fascinating that one is reluctant to lay down his book until the last page has been turned.

The events leading to the foundation of the London Veterinary College in 1791, the