

Book Reviews

Physikalische Heilmethoden in der ersten Wiener Medizinischen Schule, by URSULA SCHÄFER (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Geschichte der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften, No. 4), Vienna, Hermann Böhlau, 1967, pp. 238, illus., ÖS.108.

Medicine on the European continent has always favoured physical treatment methods more than its insular counterpart in these Islands. It is probably only since the advent of the National Health Service that the accolade of respectability has been conferred upon 'Physical Medicine', as it is now known here, by recognizing it as a specialty in its own right.

It is true that, in their nineteenth-century heyday, Harrogate and Bath rivalled such mid-European spas as Baden-Baden and Karlsbad, which specialized in baths, massage and, of course, 'taking the waters'. On the other hand, although other physical techniques notably electrotherapy were pioneered by such men as Duchenne de Boulogne, they were and still are, on the whole, considered to be cranky and 'on the fringe'.

This large paperback deals with the practice and practitioners of physical medicine in the Austria of the eighteenth century. The text begins with a somewhat scrappy historical review. In this connection, a definitive history of physical medicine remains to be written. It should be interesting for, after all, few specialties can boast such widely differing characters as Benjamin Franklin, Marat and John Wesley. Be that as it may, an account of Viennese medicine in the age of Maria Theresa is then followed by a chapter on physical healing methods in the eighteenth century, taking in hydrotherapy, massage, gymnastics and electrotherapy.

The main body of the work, however, deals in detail and seriatim with the members of the First Viennese School—van Swieten, de Haen and his critic Kirchvogl, and Stoll. The section ends with some observations on the technical hypothesis underlying the basis of this form of treatment in Vienna.

For reasons which are not apparent to me, the work of a further six practitioners is then detailed. These are lesser lights such as Plenciz, Quarin and Hasenöhr.

A final summary is preceded by yet another biographical discussion on the role of the last practitioner of the period, Pasqual Joseph Ferro (1753–1809) who was a great believer in the virtues of cold water.

In addition to a list of sources and a bibliography, there are liberal footnotes throughout as well as four glossy plates at the end of the book, which has been published as one of a series by the Austrian Academy of Science.

It has obviously been a labour of love for its authoress. Although the layout of the text requires some tidying-up in my view, it provides a useful introduction to a somewhat esoteric subject.

I. M. LIBRACH

Surgeon in the Crimea, by GEORGE LAWSON, London, Constable, 1968, pp. 209, illus., 35s.

George Lawson was the son of a City wine merchant. He enrolled at King's College in 1848 at the age of seventeen years, obtaining the M.R.C.S. Eng. in 1852. After becoming house-surgeon to Sir William Fergusson he entered the Army as Assistant

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Surgeon in 1854, serving through the Crimean War. He was invalided home because of typhus fever and resigned his commission in 1856. He then became Clinical Assistant to William Bowman at Moorfields Hospital, being elected Assistant Surgeon there in 1862 at the same time as Jonathan Hutchinson. A year later he joined the staff of the Middlesex Hospital again as Assistant Surgeon. He was a member of Council of the Royal College of Surgeons and Surgeon-Oculist to Queen Victoria. He died in 1903.

This short book of 209 pages recounts his experiences as a Crimean surgeon in letters to his family during 1854–55. It is edited by Victor Bonham-Carter, whose grandfather was first cousin to Florence Nightingale. George Lawson had seven sons. The daughter of one of them—Miss Monica Lawson, inherited these Crimean letters and they remained unpublished until she showed them to Mr. Bonham-Carter.

The book has fifteen chapters, notes on the text, a list of sources, an index, three maps and fifteen illustrations. The first three chapters deal with the historical reasons for the Crimean War. The remainder of the work revolves round Lawson's letters to his family.

He sailed from Woolwich in the five-hundred-ton brig *Cape of Good Hope*, the party including nine surgeons. He wrote that the chief amusement of the passengers was whist, which they started in the morning and finished at night. He stayed at the Minerva Hotel, Valletta, for ten days where he was disturbed by 'the little thing what hops'. Landing in Gallipoli he commented, 'Of all the uncivilised, uncultivated, miserable places you have ever seen or heard of, I should think Gallipoli would surpass all.' He admired his French allies whom he envied because 'The way in which they have provided for the soldiers is wonderful'. Conditions at the General Hospital in Varna prompted him to remark that—'the state of the rooms seem rather to be fitted for the reception of cattle than sick men.'

When he himself became ill, his fellow-surgeon Dr. Forrest wrote that his recovery was most miraculous because of the 'continued and profuse haemorrhage from the bowels'. This would seem to be bacillary dysentery rather than typhoid fever, as the Editor suggests on page 64.

At Balaclava the conditions he faithfully describes were appalling—'dark, dismal, cheerless in the extreme, the thermometer falling to ten degrees below freezing point'. At first he was suspicious of nurses, but later on relented, writing of eight nurses that 'they will prove invaluable and do more real good than thirty clumsy soldiers employed as hospital orderlies.'

In early 1855 he had another feverish bout which was healed by blistering of the neck. This treatment was worse than the disease—'I think I ought to think myself rather a fortunate fellow in being alive.'

After nearly seventeen months he returned to England, but the illnesses contracted whilst in the Crimea took their toll of his stamina. Nevertheless he enjoyed a successful surgical practice in Harley Street until his death at the age of seventy-one.

This is a first-class book written with sympathy and objectivity and must be warmly recommended.

I. M. LIBRACH