

Book Reviews

JOHN Z. BOWERS, *When the twain meet. The rise of western medicine in Japan*. (Henry E. Sigerist Supplements to the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, No. 8), Baltimore, Md., and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xi, 173, £8.50.

This book shares the same characteristics as its predecessor, *Western medical pioneers in feudal Japan* (Johns Hopkins, 1970), in that it is encyclopaedic rather than analytic, heavy on detail but correspondingly light on illumination of the whys and wherefores. The earlier book covered the careers of Kaempfer, Thunberg, Siebold, and Pompe van Meerdervoort; here the story is continued with Otto Mohnike, who arrived in 1848, Van den Broek, Willis, Mueller, Baelz, and Hepburn. There is much of interest, not only in the personal lives of these unusual men but also in their writings on Japan: Mohnike's shock at the high incidence of blindness and leprosy, Willis's work with military casualties in such out of the way places as Aizu, and his intriguing friendship with Saigo Takamori, and Mueller's work in the first medical school, *Igakkō*, which was to prove its excellence in so short a time. Valuable as all this is, however, I have one caveat. The account is presented almost entirely through the eyes of these Europeans, whose diaries and books are extensively paraphrased. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but the cumulative effect is to place the Japanese in the role of passive receivers of superior wisdom, and, of course, the matter is much more complicated than this. To tackle such a subject as this with no real control of the Japanese sources, despite the occasional use of highly qualified Japanese informants, is a dangerous business and shows us that the spirit of Orientalism is still alive and, unfortunately, well. I mention this not to lambast the distinguished author for his lack of Japanese, but rather to warn the unwitting reader that the title is in the ultimate analysis ironic. The overall assumption seems to be that this set of brilliant Europeans sacrificed the best years of their lives banging their heads against a door that was only opened with painful reluctance. The silly people just could not grasp what it was they were rejecting. There is, in fact, no meeting of minds in this book at all, because one of the two parties involved is not really allowed to speak. Let us hope that the inside picture will be drawn for us in due course. Meanwhile, use this work with this caveat in mind and it should prove to be of considerable value.

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ERNA LESKY, *Meilensteine der Wiener Medizin. Grosse Ärzte Österreichs in drei Jahrhunderten*, Vienna, Verlag Wilhelm Maudrich, 1981, 4to, pp. 251, illus. Ös. 980.00.

This book is completely different from the meticulously documented and closely argued works that one associates with Erna Lesky. Indeed, in the Preface she invites persons interested in footnotes to consult her other publications. In this book, which Lesky obviously enjoyed writing, she seems to be sharing some of the best stories she has accumulated in a life of studying Viennese medicine. As such, the book is a great success.

Lesky's object is to survey three centuries of medical history and to place important medical developments in their cultural and social context. More than half the page space is devoted to pictures; this leaves only about one hundred pages of solid text. One might expect that such a relatively short treatment of so broad a topic would ramble or be filled with generalities, but Lesky's book is not subject to either defect. The book treats a carefully selected sample of important developments; the discussion of each development consists mostly of relevant anecdotes and factual curiosities, with just enough historical narrative to maintain continuity and perspective. The result is intimate and richly detailed, and much more enlightening than one could reasonably expect. Moreover, the content is sufficiently interesting that one can open the book to almost any page and be fascinated by what one finds there.

Like most pictorial histories of medicine, this book will be most appreciated by those who already have a fair knowledge of the subject. But *Meilensteine* presupposes much more than most comparable works. There are frequent references to persons (Abraham a St. Clara, Schwarzenberg, Karl Lueger), places (Prater, the Graben, Karlskirche), and eras (Jose-