

Book Reviews

John Walker-Smith, *Enduring memories: a paediatric gastroenterologist remembers. A tale of London and Sydney*, Spennymoor, The Memoir Club, 2003, pp. xv, 304, £17.50 (hardback 1-84104-052-5).

Enduring memories is both an autobiography and an evocation, or more correctly a celebration, of a largely vanished world. John Walker-Smith, an accomplished paediatric gastroenterologist, charts his career from his early education in a privileged and Anglophile public school in Sydney, Australia, through his years of medical training, his decision to become a medical scientist, and the long career of research and specialist practice that followed in Sydney and London. This is a candid and sincere portrait of a life devoted to improving the health of children with serious and debilitating conditions in a field that, if already in existence in the 1950s, had yet to be consolidated. Walker-Smith has been intimately involved in the development and advancement of this field and his story is a valuable one for historians of paediatric medicine.

Walker-Smith's book also sheds rich light on two key episodes in the history of modern British medicine. First, he describes in detail the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts made by the Conservative government of the early 1990s to close the ancient institution of St Bartholomew's Hospital, with regrettable repercussions for the morale of the hospital staff (not least for Walker-Smith himself) and many of their patients. Second, he explores the ongoing controversy concerning the claim that there might be a link between the MMR jab and the putative increase in the incidence of children suffering from autism. Walker-Smith, who was involved in the research and writing of the paper that caused such massive press interest, describes some of the disparities between the media representation of the argument and the claims actually made by Wakefield *et al.* He expresses regret that the press was so rapidly involved in the issue, but defends the integrity of Wakefield and his colleagues as scientists and insists that it remains entirely valid to explore the possibility of a link between the MMR jab and a small

number of cases where gastroenterological disorders are associated with autistic-like symptoms. It is an engaging discussion of a too often polarized issue.

This book is not just a survey of a life in medicine. Walker-Smith devotes large sections to broader reflections: on the relations between Britain and Australia, the role and significance of the monarchy, on tradition, poetry, literature and art. Walker-Smith is an ardent monarchist and a believer in the desirability of close Anglo-Australian ties. To a growing extent (as the author appreciates), such views put him out of step with the times. And some readers might find the values expressed not to their taste. Paying homage to such poets as Housman and Kipling, Walker-Smith sees much to admire in a past where deference to royalty, institutions and the traditions they were meant to embody seemed to come more readily. But there is no crude flag-waving here. In a rather moving passage, he recalls the words Viscount Slim addressed to himself and the other boys at his Sydney public school: "You boys are having a very privileged education. You, yourselves, have done nothing to deserve it. You need to spend the rest of your life paying back the debt you have incurred." Walker-Smith's book shows how these values of civic duty and public service conditioned his enthusiasm for and approach to caring for sick children.

Enduring memories will be of considerable interest to Walker-Smith's friends, family and colleagues. But it will also be of value to any historian wishing to understand the development in Britain and Australia of the speciality of paediatric gastroenterology as well as the debates over NHS restructuring in the 1990s.

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Peter O Williams, *The exotic fruits of my life*, Bletchingdon, Rana, 2003, pp. ix, 158, illus., £20.00 (hardback 0-9538092-1-8). Orders to: Rana, Courtyard House, Church End, Bletchingdon, Oxfordshire OX5 3DL.

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The frontispiece of *The exotic fruits of my life* is a portrait of the author of this beautifully produced book. Peter Williams looks out upon the world with an expression of amused satisfaction. But there is no complacency. In the later chapters political correctness means nothing to him. Brought up in a British colony, he does not hesitate to praise the old colonial system for its contributions to the welfare of those whom it ruled, in contrast to the chaos that reigns in so many former colonial territories today.

Peter Williams may well feel satisfaction in his achievements. A highly successful Director of the Wellcome Trust for twenty-six years, he is a Commander of the British Empire and has received honorary degrees from the Universities of Birmingham, Glasgow, the West Indies and Nottingham. In addition he achieved an academic award denied to Margaret Thatcher, an honorary degree from the University of Oxford.

The story of his family is one of upward mobility. Williams' grandfather was a Dorset lobster fisherman, a bearded patriarch portrayed in one of the plentiful illustrations. His father became a gardener in a local country house, then went on to Kew, from where he joined the Colonial Service, becoming Curator of the Botanic Gardens at Port-of-Spain in Trinidad. There Peter Williams was born in 1925. He describes in lyric detail life in a British Colony before the Second World War, the gardens that he knew and the plants and fruits that so enchanted his father, his brother and himself. The family were transferred later to posts in Palestine, where civil unrest was a new experience. Soon they returned to Trinidad and from there Peter Williams went to St John's College, Cambridge, to study medicine. There he met his wife Billie who came to mean so much to him and who so devotedly supported him in his career. He studied medicine at St Mary's Hospital, served for a while in the Army Medical Corps, and then joined the staff of the Wellcome Trust in 1960. At once he was thrown into the company of Trustees such as Sir Henry Dale, and he has since enjoyed fruitful relationships with a succession of Trustees who have included Sir John

McMichael, Professor Robert Thompson, Sir Stanley Peart and Sir David Weatherall. He became Director in 1965, serving for twenty-six years. It was a period during which a relatively small Trust, with an income of no more than £1 million pounds a year, became at the time of his retirement, thanks to the efforts of individual chairmen such as Sir Roger Gibbs, the largest medical charity in the world.

His major interest during that time was the support of medical research in Britain. With John McMichael as one of his Trustees, he gave strong support to research at the bedside, pioneering research fellowships for clinical academic staff in the Universities. But the tropics were in his blood and he played a major role in developing important research programmes in Africa, the Caribbean and the Far East. He was also influential in encouraging gastrointestinal studies in Vellore, South India. His accounts of travel in countries where facilities were limited to say the least provides entertaining reading. More than one distinguished Trustee, courageous and uncomplaining, had to endure dodgy hotels, vehicle breakdowns and the maladies of travel, usually intestinal, in African countries such as Kenya or Nigeria in Peter Williams' company.

There is an all too brief chapter on 'The development of medical history as an academic subject'. In fact, it was Peter Williams who ensured that the terms of Henry Wellcome's Will, which demanded of his Trustees that they should support his Museum and the remarkable Library that he had amassed during his lifetime, would be honoured. The Museum was very rightly transferred to the Science Museum where it prospers. The Library too has been maintained, but in addition the Trust created, during Williams' time as Director, an Institute for the History of Medicine where medical history was wrenched from the arthritic clutches of retired members of the medical profession and placed firmly in the hands of a new core of professional historians—Roy Porter, Vivian Nutton, Bill Bynum, Christopher Lawrence to give a few examples. For this he deserves the eternal thanks of all those who read *Medical History*. The Institute prospers today as

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the Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London.

The author's deep affection for his wife Billie is attested by his inclusion of three short stories from her pen. In a chapter entitled 'A fruitful interaction', he describes with affection his life with Billie and the family that they created together.

This is, as one might expect from Peter Williams, a book that has its idiosyncrasies. Sadly there is no index, nor are there full references to the works quoted. But for all that, it is an entertaining book which should engage the attention of all those who have followed the remarkable fortunes of the Wellcome Trust and its one-time Director.

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Eduard Seidler, Karl-Heinz Leven,

Geschichte der Medizin und der Krankenpflege, seventh revised and extended edition, Stuttgart, W Kohlhammer, 2003, pp. 333, €18.90, (paperback 3-17-017624-2).

The forerunner of this textbook for students of medicine and the healthcare professions was first published by Eduard Seidler in 1966 with the title *Geschichte der Pflege des kranken Menschen* (History of the Care for the Sick). Several editions of the textbook focused mainly on the history of care, in accordance with the strict division between care and medicine in Germany. In 1993, Eduard Seidler, this time together with Karl-Heinz Leven, aimed at combining the history of medicine and healthcare in the sixth edition. The authors thereby tried to connect the developments of both professions without neglecting the many tensions between the two fields. Now, ten years later, in the introduction to the seventh edition, Seidler and Leven emphasize that they have retained the approach of 1993 and have tried to integrate new research from various fields of the history of medicine.

As a textbook aiming to provide an overview of the history of medicine and care

throughout the centuries, it is necessarily a tour de force. The first chapter on the beginnings of care—which has undergone few changes since the editions of the 1960s—as well as the subsequent synopsis of medicine and care in early cultures remain quite laconic and sketchy. The section on Graeco-Roman medicine as the root of modern western medicine, however, provides the reader with a well structured narrative: the development of Hippocratic medicine and care as well as Galen's concepts are convincingly depicted. Then, before focusing on medieval traditions, the authors make a short excursus into Byzantine medicine—strongly influenced by the Greek tradition—and they hint at the poor western reception of classical medicine in early medieval times. The authors then show how the development of monastic care under the Benedictine order was crucial for the development of a Christian European tradition of healthcare. In the case of medicine, they emphasize the high standard of Arab medicine during the Middle Ages and chronicle how Greek medical knowledge flowed back to the Christian west via medical texts in Arabic, where it was disseminated in the newly established European universities. Seidler and Leven stress that these developments fostered the division between medicine and care, since the two fields were hardly ever connected afterwards. The following chapters on humanism and the Enlightenment point to transformations in medical knowledge, in parallel with the gradual integration of the exact sciences into medicine. The authors also show that healthcare remained relatively unconcerned by this development. It was only in the course of the eighteenth century that the integration of medicine into the everyday life of hospitals slowly began to affect the practice of healthcare. In the fifty-page chapter on the nineteenth century, Seidler and Leven only have the space to brush over the numerous developments in the fields of medicine and care. They try to include the development of medicine as a natural science, the splitting up of medical studies into several curricula, the emergence of social hygiene, as well as the beginnings of communal health services and insurance systems. In the