

Book Reviews

Otto Loewi: Ein Lebensbild in Dokumenten, by F. LEMBECK and W. GIERE, Berlin and New York, Springer Verlag, 1968, pp. xii, 241, illus., DM. 36, \$9.00

Otto Loewi was born in Frankfurt in 1873, became professor of pharmacology in Graz in 1909 and laid the foundation of the theory of neurochemical transmission in 1920. For this he shared a Nobel prize with Dale in 1936, and in 1938, for being Jewish, he was briefly imprisoned and then expelled from Australia. He then emigrated to the United States where he spent the rest of his life. Loewi wrote a brilliant autobiographical memoir for *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* which is reprinted here and in its original English version. Strangely, although Loewi mentions T. R. Elliott and his paper of 1905, this appears not to have influenced, at any rate consciously, the development of Loewi's own ideas about chemical transmission.

To anyone contemplating writing a biography of Loewi or a history of physiology in the first few decades of the century, this book will be an essential source. It can also be warmly recommended to anyone with even only a modest interest in Loewi—but also, of course, with at least a modest ability to read German. The structure of this book is somewhat unconventional: the autobiographical article together with a number of other short pieces by Loewi, also in English, make up about a quarter of the book. There is the usual bibliography but also a substantial section which classifies Loewi's output, and comments on the principal papers. There is ample evidence here that Loewi would have been a major figure even had he not been a founding father of the theory of neurochemical transmission. The remainder of the book is devoted to a fascinating sequence of footnotes which fill out the details and give one a sense of the reality of the events which made up Loewi's life. They are mainly in the form of quotations, many of which testify to the affection he attracted.

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Geschichte der Medizin: Einführung in ihre Grundzüge, by ALEXANDER METTE and IRENA WINTER, East Berlin, Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1968, pp. 553, illus., £3 6s. 6d.

This hardback on the history of medicine comes from the Humboldt University, East Berlin, where both editors are staff members. The blurb indicates that it is written from the standpoint of dialectical materialism. The chapter headings confirm this approach, starting with medicine in ancient times, following with medicine in the age of slavery, medicine and feudalism, medicine and the beginnings of capitalism, and finally, medicine and the rise of socialism.

The philosophy of the work is crystallized in the contribution on hygiene and microbiology by the Professor of Medical History, Dietrich Tutzke.

Here, although some grudging credit is given to the work of Chadwick, Southwood Smith, Simon and Farr, and to the English concept of Public Health, the author hails the 'revolutionary advances' of Virchow, Neumann and Leubuscher as the vanguard of social medicine in Germany and Austria.

Later on, no mention is made of the British National Health Service and the welfare state, but praise is given to the Russian hygienist Semaschko who died in 1949.

The book ends with a revealing chapter on military medicine, in which the role of the Soviet Army Medical Service during the 'Great Patriotic War' is given due