SOME IMPRESSIONS.

THE SPAS OF CZECHO-SLOVAKIA.*

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IN the summer of 1929 I had the privilege of joining a party of French physicians on a visit to Spas of Czecho-Slovakia. It is only in response to a request that I venture to present briefly a few impressions.

The party included some distinguished Continental physicians, among whom were Dr. René Gaultier, Président de Société de Médecine de Paris, and Dr. Chares Garin, Professeur Agrégé à la Faculté de Médecine de Lyon. I was pleased to find that a lively interest was qualified by a healthy degree of scepticism.

From Paris we journeyed by train to the small frontier town of Egar and then proceeded by car to Franzesbad, one of the smallest and most pleasing of the Spas. We visited the carbonic-gas baths, which are situated in the midst of a park with seventeen different mineral springs and a bed of phosphatoferruginous mud, the treatment being considered most suitable for "rebellious gynæcological affections, skin diseases, anæmia and rheumatism." A further source of pride to the town is "the most powerful Glauber salts spring in the world." The next day we made a short excursion to the extinct volcano of Kommerbuhl and then proceeded to Marienbad. Apart from carbonic-acid and ferruginous baths, this Spa also possesses "sodie chlorutted and sodic sulphated mineral waters." Marienbad is situated 628 m. above sea-level in the northern part of Bohemia in a wide valley open to the south, with extensive pine forests on all sides. The subalpine climate is considered very healthy, the mean temperature being 9° Cel. and the mean barometer 108 mm. Whereas Marienbad calls itself "The Pearl of the World Spas," our next place of visit, Carlsbad, claims to be "The Queen of Thermal Stations." Certainly it is the largest and most famous of all the Spas and offers very many facilities. The founder, Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Roman Emperor, granted over 600 years ago that the place be named after him: Charles' Bath (Carlsbad). Since the war the Czech Government have decreed that the place should be called Károlov Vary, but there is little likelihood that this nomenclature will come into general use. The story of the discovery of Carlsbad is as follows. The Emperor was one day stag hunting in the mountains. The stag jumped from a high rock into the valley, and one of the dogs kept up the chase. The distressing howling of the dog attracted the Emperor and his suite to a spot where they found the dog scalded by a natural hot spring. On advice of the Emperor's physician, a health resort was gradually erected around this boiling and healing spring.

Actually there are several springs in Carlsbad, the two most powerful being the Sprudel and the Muhlbrunn. The former yields no less than 2,000 litres of hot water each minute, and it is really a magnificent sight to see it shooting out of the ground into the air as an enormous column of hot water (72° C.) bursting at its summit (20 ft.) into a picturesque spray. Its curative water had been used for more than one and a half centuries for bathing when Dr. Wenzel Payer (about 1520) prescribed it for drinking

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purposes also. Now one sees the most cosmopolitan crowd in the world walking to and fro along promenades sipping Sprudel water from large glass tumblers. From a superficial general observation adiposity seems to be the commonest complaint—adiposity of a magnitude rarely seen in this country and, as far as one could gather from the rotund beaming faces, not of the dolorosa variety. “The Carlsbad springs are alkalo-saline mineral waters in which sulphate of soda, carbonate of soda, and chlorate of soda predominate; the proportion of lithium it contains and its radio-activity are greater than in any thermal water of the same class. The water itself as well as the carbonic acid, freely escaping, are radio-active.” Some people who do not like travelling abroad take their Sprudel spring at home, and for this purpose Carlsbad Sprudel salts are exported to all parts of the world.

Apart from drinking water to the accompaniment of a large and vigorously conducted orchestra, the visitors besport themselves in one or more of the numerous baths—Sprudel baths, steam baths, carbonic-acid baths, mud baths, cold water baths (not very popular), and sun baths. By this time it was thought that members of the Medical Congress should obtain some personal experience. I chose a carbonic-acid bath and really felt exhilarated by the process. The bubbles of gas were fizzing through the water all the time, and any movement of the limbs caused a generation of a warm current. Owing to the effect of inspiring the escaping carbonic-acid gas, respirations became deeper and more rapid, and the total effect was altogether a pleasant one. It was during this process that it occurred to me that the inhalation of carbonic-acid gas might prove of some value for re-expanding the lung after empyema, supplementing the conventional blowing through Woulfe's bottles.

For the hot mud bath one sits in a tub of hot mud for some minutes and then transfers to a hot-water bath, where a forceful spray gets rid of the adherent mud. Although I can well imagine the heat being most soothing for rheumatic pains the treatment might be rather exhausting for those with cardio-vascular lesions. It is customary, however, to recline on a couch for some hours after the mud bath.

After Carlsbad we proceeded to Jachymov, a place of very great interest, since in 1898 Pierre Curie and Madame Curie isolated radium from the up to then worthless waste of the Jachymov uranium ore. “The radium emanation is a remedy against all complaints of gouty nature and against the rheumatism of joints and muscles. As has been experienced, the radio-active baths cure with success neurasthenia, arteriosclerosis, metabolic disorders and many skin diseases.”

Some while ago I contrasted the facts that whereas the pneumonokoniosis of South African miners is followed by tuberculosis and not by carcinoma, that of the Schneeberg miners (Saxony) was often followed by carcinoma and rarely by tuberculosis. A possible explanation of this was the radio-activity of the Saxony mines. I was therefore extremely interested to learn that the miners at Jachymov suffered to a marked extent from carcinoma of the lung. Further, that when treated by radium inhalation there was a severe exacerbation of the neoplastic process. Thus like X-rays, radium may be regarded not only as a destroyer of cancer but also as a potent carcinogenic agent.

Although not a health resort, I would mention Prague, the capital of the Czecho-Slovakian Republic. The history of Central Europe for many years revolved round this magnificent ancient town, where one can still see the great castle, Hradcany, for centuries the seat of the Kings of Bohemia. Almost every inch of the place is of

historical significance, and the magnificent buildings, representing architecture of different periods, is graced by a wealth of interior decorations. The museums and art galleries leave one spellbound with the beauty and splendour of a past era.

Proceeding on our way, we visited the fascinating stalactite grottoes of Macocha, and then passed on to Piestany. Here the warm springs gush forth from a depth of a few thousand metres from the bottom of the bed of the Vague, and immense layers of sulphurous mud deposited near these springs represent the most powerful curative factors of Piestany. It is interesting to note that Sir J. Spencer Wells, Bart., F.R.C.S., wrote an article in the *British Medical Journal* of May 5, 1888, entitled "Notes on a Visit to Pistyan," in which he praised highly the therapeutic powers of the natural resources of that place and advocated the development of it "so that invalids not only from Europe and America, but also from India and our Colonies," can avail themselves of its benefits. Piestany is very proud of its natural hot mud, which is specially beneficial for chronic rheumatism. There is a museum of crutches in the chief hotel, which contains those crutches which have been discarded by chronic rheumatic sufferers who have found relief from their treatment. I spoke to a wealthy intelligent Dutch woman who had tried all the Spas of Europe, and who was convinced that her periodic visits to Piestany were alone of much benefit to her rheumatoid arthritis. I was interested to note that there are public health schemes by which German and Austrian labouring classes are sent to Piestany for a month's treatment at very reduced rates.

From Piestany I travelled to Vienna, where I visited all the big hospitals including the famous Von Pirquet Clinic. I was greatly impressed by the courtesy I received everywhere, and by the low rate of pay and long hours of work of all the physicians, particularly the Medical First Assistants.

Though still sceptical about extravagant claims, it is difficult not to feel that the Spas have a legitimate claim to be included in our therapeutic armamentarium.

General News.

AN evening Course in Physical Medicine will be given at the London Light and Electrical Clinic, Ranelagh Road, S.W.1 (No. 24 'bus by Victoria Station), on Mondays and Wednesdays, May 2 to May 25, from 8 to 9 p.m. Methods of Treatment and Practical Demonstrations on Cases will be given, and post-graduates attending the Course can have the opportunity, if they wish, of seeing clinical cases and their treatment in the various departments during the day. The fee for the Course is £2 2s. Single lectures may be attended at a fee of 7s. 6d. per lecture, payable to the Fellowship of Medicine, or at the lecture room.

Physical Medicine.

A week-end Course of Demonstrations on Cases will be given at the Royal Albert Dock Hospital on Saturday, May 7, and Sunday, May 8, from 9.30 a.m. to 6.15 daily.