

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE.

The following interesting letter from Prague, has been placed at our disposal, by Dr. I. S. Dodge, of this city, to whom it was directed by his friend:—

PRAGUE, Sept., 1857.

MY DEAR DOCTOR:—The fall vacation having begun at Vienna, I took the cars for Prague, in order to spend from six to eight weeks at the Bohemian capital, in the pursuance of obstetrical studies; for as the Austrian medical Institutions justly deserve the reputation of being prominently practical, I expected to find this especially true of the University of Prague, with respect to her obstetrical department, and I am happy to say, that I was satisfied beyond expectation.

There is, perhaps, no branch in medical science, the practical study of which will consume so much time, as that of obstetrics, and fortunately, I had now no time to lose on other branches, during the vacation.

Arrived at Prague, in the beautiful month of July, I first tried my best and succeeded in securing lodgings, and meeting the next morning with some medical friends of Würzburg, we ascended the high hill of the "Winneberg," crowned on the top with the stately buildings of the obstetrical institution. Looking upwards from below the hill, you would imagine to see a finely situated castle or a convent.

It was early in the morning, not yet 7 o'clock when we arrived on top of the hill, and looking down once more, we were reflecting, to what degree such exercise in climbing might tend to quicken labor in pregnant women, and procure a favorable (?) position to the child; for the majority of these contributors to the human race, are unable to pay for a carriage. On the hill there was quite a number, I think about thirty, of medical men, that were going to attend the clinic, and the Professor having arrived, I rushed with the whole company into the ward, where the delivery of females takes place. In this ward there are twelve beds, six of which are usually occupied by the females, who are actually exerting themselves in the duty of increasing the population of the Austrian Empire.

Professor Seiffert, a gentleman, who stands decidedly on his own feet, examines the inmate of the first bed, while the rest look on. At first he makes the external examination with his hands on the abdomen of the woman, who is quite exposed to the eyes of bystanders. If the pelvis present any abnormal dimension, he takes Stein's pelvimeter, to ascertain the diameters, and measures the circumference of the pelvis; after this he auscultates for the foetal pulse, then he examines per vaginam, after which, the attending sons of Æsculapius exercise the same maneuvering. There were usually about thirty students present, every one anxious to make a thorough examination, and thus the poor female had to submit to a great deal of uneasiness; for it sometimes happened, that *with their finger* some of these

young gentlemen had not so much experience in exploring these regions, which was evident by the shrieks of the female, and some streaks of blood on the finger, when it was withdrawn from the vagina. The examination having been made, and some questions answered by the patient, Prof. Seiffert with a pelvis in one hand, and a leathern baby in the other, proceeded in a very instructive manner to demonstrate the case, illustrating this particular presentation, as well as also modifications of it in other cases. This discourse was always calculated to transfer knowledge to his auditors, only once in a while; he took occasion to give his opinion, of the foolish notions, which the gentlemen at Vienna and other places entertained on the subject. He then went to the next bed, where in a similar manner the peculiarities of that case were put into the proper light. His discourse was concise and to the point, his attention to the students' examination inexhaustible. If a female is going to be delivered during the clinic hours, and nature finds her powers insufficient to terminate the process favorably, the forceps are applied by one of the students, while Prof. Seiffert assists him, where he is wanting in skill. Not unfrequently the forceps were made use of, where it certainly was not always necessary, probably for two reasons: to give every student a chance to try his skill in the application of the forceps, and, perhaps, to teach the infant that important lesson at the beginning, how necessary it is to yield a little to the outside pressure, if it wishes to glide pleasantly into and through this world.

After the close of the clinic, which lasts every morning for two hours, from 7 to 9 o'clock, Prof. Seiffert pays a visit to the different wards of the house, where the females are placed after their delivery, and we had thus an opportunity to witness some anomalies consequent upon the period of parturition. There were always some mild cases of puerperal fever. Prof. Seiffert has the custom to step from one bed to another, and counting the pulse of the patient, without asking a great many questions of her. If the pulse was not frequent, he would almost systematically pronounce the word "healthy," without making many further inquiries, and if the pulse was found to be increased in fre-

quency, he was in the habit of ordering a few doses of aqua Viennensis, essentially an infusion of senna, and he insisted on it with much fervor, that it was best in such cases to move the bowels, and not to give opium. Students and physicians not belonging to the institution are allowed to accompany the Professor only into those wards, which are on the second floor, for in upper regions there are private apartments, visited only by the Professor himself or by his assistants.

After having attended the clinic for a few days, I was fully convinced, that I had come to the proper place for the cultivation of this branch in medical science, and procured tickets for the clinic, for the "Inspections course," and for the diseases of females, the clinic of which was held in the female department of the general hospital—"Allgemeines Krankenhaus." These tickets are good only for eight weeks, after which time they must be renewed and paid again, if the holder wishes to continue his visits longer.

Now permit me to tell you of the other arrangements in this institution, and let me know if there is to be found the like in any other city. By taking the ticket for the inspection-course, I was entitled to the right,

1. Of entering the Lying-in-Hospital at any time day or night, to inspect the females—excluding the attending midwives—occupying the delivery ward;

2. Of staying in the "inspector's" room every 24 hours, when my turn would come;

3. Of taking my lodging in the "Kaserne," if I could secure a bed.

The inspector's room was adjoining the delivery ward, and furnished with four large sofas, besides a table and chairs. It was destined to be the abode of four "inspectors," i. e. four students taken by the order of the list; for the time of 24 hours. By looking through the window, you would see a long one story building, running parallel to the obstetrical hospital, and separated from it by a narrow passage; this long building was termed the "Kaserne," which name is usually applied to the barracks of soldiers. In the inspector's room is a handle

fixed to a wire, which passes through the wall over the road into the Kaserne, and there it is attached to a bell. The Kaserne consists of six rooms, each containing four beds furnished by the institution, these beds are let to students without any additional charge, and the bell is rung by the mid-wife on service, whenever the labor of a female seems to bring her delivery near. Now sir, this is an excellent arrangement.

I tried every means to become an inhabitant of the Kaserne. I spoke to Prof. Seiffert about it, and tried to engage his assistant in my favor, but without any other result, than hope for the future. When a bed became vacant, there were more than half a dozen of applicants, who claimed priority, and it seemed to me, as though the native Austrians were a little favored. It is true, I had a fine room in town, but when I came on the hill in the morning, I heard what had taken place during the night; five births all natural, or one breech presentation, or the forceps applied in two cases, or twins, etc. Then I felt deeply, what losses I had sustained, and patiently waited after the clinic for six or more hours in the ward with the hope, something interesting might come to make good my losses—but no—the little babies prefer to see first rather the light of an oil-lamp, than to view the rosy light of the sky. What was to be done? To sleep in town and let the most interesting births pass by during the night in the hospital, noticed by others, would certainly not give me much profit; to sit all the night long by the bed of the female, who would perhaps not be delivered until early in the morning, was rather too hard a task to perform for any length of time; to lay down on one of the beds not occupied by two mortal beings—one enclosed within the other—and to enjoy a pleasant dream, was against the rule of the house. But still man is not at a loss, as long as he does not lose himself.

I soon made the observation that the inspectors room was almost always vacant after eleven o'clock at night, the gentlemen preferring to be either at their lodgings in town, or in their bed in the Kaserne, if they had one. What could be more reasonable for me, than to pretend every evening at eleven o'clock, that it was my duty to stay there all night? Thus the

inspectors' room was mine all night, and there I slept on the sofa within my clothes, after having obtained some covering material with some unnecessary fleas in it, from the adjoining ward by stealth, to protect me from taking cold. Thus I had—not regarding the presence of the little criminals, which were trying very briskly to work themselves through my epidermal cells—the best situation I could imagine, for whenever a birth took place during the night, the attending mid-wife rushed into my room to pull the bell, in order to arouse the occupants of the Kaserne from their sweet slumber, and I being at the seat of war in an instant, witnessed every birth, while it sometimes was terminated so soon, that when my colleagues hurried up stairs into the ward, the battle was already fought, and they returned very much disappointed to their quarters. Every morning I arose from my comfortable (?) couch before 5 o'clock, and felt in my limbs as stiff, as though I had been put on the rack. I then went once more into the ward, and examined the females, that were in the beds; after having then washed my hands only, I went down into the town to my lodgings, where I paid the proper attention to my toilet, visited then a café to take breakfast, and found myself again at seven 7 o'clock in the hospital to attend the clinic.

We had frequently an opportunity to witness the action of the forceps. They make here slight alternate tractions from one side to another; Scanzoni of Würzburg, does the same, but in Vienna they do not change the direction toward the sides, or they do not make any part of the forceps act as a fulcrum. After the delivery of the child, that of the placenta is quietly waited for, and when received, it is carefully examined, to see that all its parts have been removed, from the mother. A legal prosecution was instituted just at that time against a mid-wife, who in private practice had not removed all of the placenta, upon which puerperal symptoms set in, and the poor woman died of pyæmic fever in the female ward of the general hospital, to which she had been removed from the city.

It is also a very laudable rule of the Lying-in-Hospital, that every one is held to soap his hands after each examination, before

laying hands on another patient, for instances have occurred here in former years, where syphilis was transferred from one female to another, by the unclean fingers of those persons who examined them.

Thus I passed two weeks, when I thought, I should try once more to become a member of the community in the Kaserne. With the higher authorities I had failed to secure any success, so I descended in the scale, and prevailed upon the female, who had the immediate domestic charge of the rooms, to furnish me with a bed, and promising her a good fee, I succeeded and became one of them, and was now free from nightly blood suckers; was always within reach of the sound of the bell, which roused us every night several times, and only imagine with what a hurry on such occasions every body would try to get into his clothes to some extent at least, for complete buttoning was not required, as the night was dark, and the females' attention entirely engaged with their own condition; in this bustle, many a one would put a boot on one foot and a slipper on the other, and thus appear in the hall before the altar of science, where nature was the high priest, wielding her scepter with her creative power.

Often we were paid well, for thus depriving ourselves of our night's rest, for we saw a good number of different presentations, some cases of twins, some of abortion, a few where the child did not survive, and none where the mother died, except the case of the mid-wife, of which we only saw the result of the mal-practice. It is said that more than 3000 females are delivered annually at this hospital. A careful record is kept of each birth, containing the name and age of the mother, the weight of the child, the time when labor began, and when the delivery of the child and the placenta occurred, the presentation of the child, the mode by which the delivery was terminated, whether by the efforts of nature or by art, and finally general remarks.

The institution derives its support from funds furnished by the Austrian government. Every woman of the land that is pregnant, can gain admission. If she be poor, the town or village where she comes from, is under the obligation of paying a

small daily tax, about 20 cents, to the institution. If she be in better circumstances with respect to money matters, or if she has a paying lover, she can obtain more comfortable accommodations, and is not to be used in the service of science, but on the contrary, the scientific men are at her service, and she can come into the house for admission and accommodations without her name being asked, or notice being given to her relatives.

Those who have been delivered can stay, until they feel quite well enough to leave. If a mother feels herself unable to support and raise her child, she is at liberty to give it up to the foundling department of the institution, in which the poor little cosmopolitan is taken care of, by appointed nurses and waiting women, until it reaches the age of some years, after which time steps are taken, to find out some proper family in any part of the country, that will take further charge of it.

Such a child certainly deserves to be pitied, but still this arrangement is well calculated, to erase those criminal acts from history, where a mother is driven by despair to kill her own issue.

And now somebody might suppose, that the females, delivered here, belong to the outcast of society. Well, they may be to some extent a part of this unhappy class, but certainly a great many of them are even morally not quite forlorn, and as for their looks, a good number of them are handsome, and once in a while you will meet with one, that can pass for a model of perfect natural beauty. Seeing such poor victims of a weak moment, all sensual thoughts are driven off with the reflection, that this poor creature might have rendered a good husband comfortable and happy, had it been her lot, to pass into life under more favorable circumstances, for almost all of them have been betrayed by some miserable scoundrel, and did not fall into such an error with the intention of trade; and strangely was I surprised to find from conversation with them, that, although they would strengthen their mind in the future, they would still continue to love the man, who had reduced them to so miserable a condition. I had frequently an opportunity, when the time flowed tediously, and I felt no disposition to study, to sit down by the bed side of such an unhappy girl, and to enter into a

conversation with her on her past history, which generally was a very melancholy one, but often showed clearly, that she kept still a good stock of moral sense, and in many an instance she continued in the fostered hope of the legal union with her lover at the altar.

By treating such females as outcasts, society commits a moral crime, and drives a poor creature entirely to the low degree of misery, from which no power can deliver her; whereas the remembrance of the proverb, that every man is liable to error, would return many a girl to the rank of virtue, not to be claimed perhaps with justice by many a one, who is looked upon as a pattern of moral purity. From what I have learned of these Bohemian girls, it is not the custom of respectable families, to refuse their services as house-maids, provided they hold in other things a good reputation.

Besides the course in obstetrics, which stands, I believe, unequalled for its excellent arrangements, I attended a private course of Prof. Seiffert's in diseases of females, for which plenty of cases were furnished in the female department of the general hospital. All the other departments of the hospital were closed for the vacation.

Prague is provided with extensive means for medical studies; her general hospital is very large; and a fine building for pathological anatomy is just being finished. I saw the culprits of the state prison in chains, carry the stones and other building material to the place. Until now the post-mortem examinations were made at the hospital, several being made every day. The first and much esteemed Professor of Surgery, Pitha, has been called to the same chair in the Josephinum at Vienna, where the surgeons for the Austrian army, receive their medical education Waller is the Professor on syphilis, and is regarded by the students as an excellent teacher. So much about Prague, I will write you my next letter from Berlin.

Truly your friend,
ARNOLD STROTHOTTE.