

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Dr Samways Writes to the Editor. The Life and Times of an Exceptional Physician (1857-1931)**

***by Tom Treasure***

Hardback, 293 pages

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Tom Treasure is a retired Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery and medical historian. Ostensibly a biography of Doctor Daniel West Samways (1857 – 1931), Treasure explains how his interest in Samways was piqued by discovering Samways's prediction in 1898, that severe mitral stenosis would become amenable to surgery.

This book is far from a conventional biography and the author is hampered by the absence of any of Samways's personal correspondence. He charts Samways's progress from childhood in Hampshire, through pre-clinical studies at Cambridge and clinical studies then house jobs at Guy's Hospital. The seminal period of Samways's life follows, undertaking research at Guy's into the pathology of post-rheumatic heart disease and mitral stenosis, leading to a Cambridge MD in 1894. Samways paid for his dedication, contracting pulmonary TB, necessitating a fashionable but unpleasant sea voyage to Australia and then a sojourn on the French Riviera in early 1893. Rejuvenated by this, Samways became an advocate for French health resorts writing guidebooks for two. By the winter of 1896/7, and with a French MD, Samways had settled on a bipartite clinical practice, working as a GP in Menton in winter each year, the remainder in clinical practice at Clyst St. George in Devon, interrupted only by duties at Exeter's No. 5 War Hospital from 1915 to 1918.

Fortunately, Samways remained a prolific correspondent to the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and, to a lesser extent, the Lancet and the main themes in the book are linked to this correspondence. Between 1896 and 1932, the BMJ published 89 letters written by Samways of which 37 were about cardiac disease and 7 were about pulmonary TB. Samways was not afraid to challenge the views of leading authorities, including Osler, Mackenzie and Starling.

The main strength of this book comes from the expert way that the author weaves Samways' letters into the historical narrative relevant to these conditions. There is an excellent afterword to help readers understand modern developments in the treatment of mitral stenosis, pleural disease and tuberculosis. A useful glossary is included. The book could benefit from higher quality images.

Overall, a highly readable and original contribution to this fascinating area of medical history that should appeal to many.

**Bryan Rhodes**

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