"An ancient temple of healing" (1916; left) and wounded soldiers in hospital uniform of the first world war (1920)

are neither popular nor readily appreciated, not least because they are obscured by dusty glass and furnishings. In 1984 a critic described them as showing bloodless piety rather than purity and complained that the maidens are impossibly angelic and incorruptible virgins, a children's fairytale world.³

I used to stare hard at Cayley Robinson's murals daily in my 15 years at the Middlesex Hospital and medical school. My life was made happier by the

presence of these paintings, and they were one stimulus to my devoting much of my non-biomedical energies to beautifying hospitals.

I thank Steve Paratian, photographic department, Faculty of Clinical Science, University College, for the illustrations.

1 Brown D. *Frederick Cayley Robinson ARA*. London: Fine Art Society, 1977.

2 Stevens MA. Frederick Cayley Robinson. *Connoisseur* 1977;196(September): 23-35.

3 Cork R. Art and the national health. *Artline* 1984;2(3):6.

Thank you, Mr Shaw

Murray T Pheils

The correspondence between my father, Elmer T Pheils, and George Bernard Shaw has been in my possession since my father's death in 1952. Shaw first consulted my father, an osteopath, in 1924. The occasion is described by Shaw in a letter to the *Times*¹ and in *Doctors' Delusions*.² The subject of Shaw's letter to the *Times*, Dr Axham, had been struck off the medical register for giving an anaesthetic to a patient so that Sir Herbert Barker could manipulate the knee joint. Sir Herbert Barker was a bonesetter and not a registered medical practitioner. Shaw vigorously supported Dr Axham's case against the General Medical Council. In his letter Shaw described the treatment he had received from my father after a back injury while walking in Ireland: "It took me ten days to get to Birmingham, where an American D.O. [doctor of osteopathy], also classed as a blackleg by the G.M.C., set me right after 75 minutes' skilled manipulation."

Elmer T Pheils

My father was born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1879 and trained in osteopathy at Kirksville, Missouri, under George Still, who was the founder of the American osteopathic profession. He subsequently obtained medical registration in the state of Ohio. He came to London in 1907 for a working vacation with Dr Horne, one of the few American osteopaths practising in England at that time. He moved to Birmingham, where there was no one else in practice, and married my mother in 1910. Initially my father received a hostile reception from the medical profession, and I can remember being described as a quack's son by another boy at my preparatory school. In the end his skill and successful practice was acknowledged, and he made many close friends in the medical profession; indeed, he insisted that both his sons went to medical school.

My father's vision had started to deteriorate before he came to England because of retinitis pigmentosa.

His younger brother, who became an osteopath in Toledo, was also affected and so were his sister's sons. My father had to have all his correspondence read to him. He subscribed to several press cutting agencies and was always well informed about medical advances. We all read to him, but in later years he employed an extra secretary mainly for this purpose. He claimed that his poor vision enhanced his sense of touch and contributed to his skills in joint manipulation. He also had an enhanced ability to see in the dark. He was in the habit of snoozing while listening to the radio after dinner at night, then phoning his friends, sometimes after midnight, and then going for a walk before retiring in the early hours. He was well known to the policemen on the beat and the all night chemist in Birmingham. Radio and the telephone were a godsend to him.

As a medical student I occasionally assisted him in his practice. He would formally introduce me to his patients as I think he was proud of having a son who was a medical student. I would hold knees or legs when he wished to rotate the lumbar spine. He was always gentle—I never saw him hurt a patient. The concept of manipulation under anaesthesia was anathema to him.

Malvern

I was 7 years old when Shaw became a patient of my father's, but I came to know him well when we went to live in Malvern, where Shaw went for vacation. Both Shaw and my father enjoyed walking the Malvern Hills and often accompanied each other when Shaw was in Malvern for the weekends. My brother and I joined them when we were at home. Shaw was great company and took the opportunity to discuss a variety of subjects: politics, religion, science, history, theatre, music, boxing, and baseball. He walked and talked with great vigour and made dramatic gestures, sometimes with his walking stick, to illustrate a point—on one occasion I remember we had a competition to see

On 15 August 1926 Shaw wrote to Pheils, who had a just had an operation for acute appendicitis, from Stresa, on the shores of Lake Maggiore, northern Italy:

Are you all right again? We were horrified to hear that you were in a nursing home (probably the one I escaped); and your letter does not say a word about it. I have been suffering frightfully from hypertrophic inflammation of my 70th birthday, and am still full of neuritis, which I have no hope of getting rid of until I see you again.

who could throw the walking stick the furthest. Sometimes the discussions became quite heated as my father liked to provoke him on one of his pet topics. They were unlikely friends: Shaw, Irish, intellectual, socialist, vegetarian, non-smoker, and strict teetotaler; my father, American, outspoken, rumbustious (Shaw's description³), and fond of food, whisky, and cigars. Shaw was a striking figure: Panama hat, Norfolk jacket, breeches, long socks, brogues, and walking stick.

On occasions Shaw would walk home with us to illustrate a musical point related to our newly acquired electric gramophone. When Shaw and his wife, Charlotte, came to lunch our household was put on its best behaviour. My mother had many anxious moments producing a vegetarian menu and on one occasion the gravy had to be returned because it was made with meat stock. Charlotte had a dampening influence, and we were all aware that Shaw was much more subdued in her presence. They sometimes arrived unexpectedly, particularly to let us have some complimentary tickets to the Malvern or Three Choirs Festivals. This could embarrass my mother as my father had eccentric eating habits and often did not eat Sunday lunch until 4 pm. When the Shaws arrived unexpectedly at 3 pm cocktails were rapidly removed, lunch delayed, and afternoon tea served. Shaw would sometimes drive himself around in his custom built, dark brown Lanchester, of which he was very proud. Charlotte always wanted him to bring the chauffeur because Shaw was notoriously accident prone. The complimentary tickets that I received were usually for the Three Choirs Festival and, although I enjoyed the music, I found sitting on a pew at Worcester, Hereford, or Gloucester Cathedral for several hours something of an ordeal. We did attend several Shaw plays at the Malvern Festival, including the premier of

The Apple Cart, a play which has some relevance in these days of the debate on republicanism.

Osteopathy

My father enlisted Shaw's help to get a school of osteopathy started in London. Much of their correspondence is related to this venture, and Shaw edited and commented on the appeal pamphlets with handwritten notes in the margins. My father was president

On 18 December 1926 Shaw wrote in response to Pheil's invitation to attend a banquet in aid of establishing a school of osteopathy:

I'd rather die. I refuse all banquets. The fact is notorious; and if I made an exception for the Yosteops nobody would ever believe that I am unbiased on the question afterwards.

of the British Association of Osteopaths and chairman of the appeal committee. He tried very hard to persuade Shaw to attend and speak at a banquet at the Dorchester Hotel and even enlisted the help of Lady Astor. Shaw, however, declined to attend, writing "Banquet be blowed!" in the margin of his letter. The school was eventually opened in Dorset Square in about 1934. My father insisted that it should be open only to medical graduates.

On 4 March 1928 Shaw replied on behalf of his wife to Pheil's request for Charlotte to be patron of an appeal:

My wife is in bed with one of her bronchial attacks, and asks me to write to you very nicely to explain how, hampered as she is with a celebrated name, she must not sign appeals for money, as there would be no end to it if she did. Also, her husband always tells her never to sign anything except a cheque, and then as far as possible by way of endorsement. In short, to put it as nicely as I can, she ———— won't.

The Society of Friends

Shaw was an admirer of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, and my father came from a Quaker family on his mother's side. This is mentioned in the correspondence, and I can recollect some discussion about Quakerism during our walks. I believe it was partly because of Shaw that my brother and I were educated at a Quaker school, Leighton Park. When I was about to go to university Shaw told my father that he thought I might be more suited to law than medicine and persuaded my father to send me to Cambridge rather than direct to medical school. Thank you, Mr Shaw.

Elgar

Sir Edward Elgar was a close friend of Shaw and had a house at Little Malvern. When Elgar became sick Shaw tried to persuade him to consult my father, who he described as a "rumbustious American, whose resemblance to an ophicleide would please you."³ I can remember that my father met Elgar, but I do not believe that he treated him. This would have been about 1932 as Elgar died from cancer in 1934.

My older brother committed suicide at the age of 25. He was a final year medical student, and I presume that he had deep depression as a result of failing his final

GBS, Elmer T Pheils, and Murray Pheils in the Malverns, 1933

MB examination. My parents never recovered from the shock of his death, and my father felt responsible because he had persuaded my brother to continue in medicine despite his difficulty with the examinations and a lack of motivation. Shaw sent my father a deeply sympathetic card headed "Absolom O Absolom my son."

In 1938 Shaw developed pernicious anaemia, and I remember my father discussing this with Billy Cooper, who was Shaw and Charlotte's osteopath in London. Shaw was persuaded to see Dr Horace Evans, who made the diagnosis and prescribed injections of liver extract, which Shaw accepted despite his vegetarian principles. In 1940 when my father treated the Queen, now the Queen Mother, Shaw showed his sense of fun: he wrote a card addressed to "Sir Elmer," saying, "I forgot to congratulate you on your debut as surgeon to the Queen. All your friends chuckled no end."

Wedding present

When I married in 1941 Shaw sent a leather bound copy of *St Joan* inscribed, "To Murray's bride all good betide." This was sent to my father with a covering letter. He could not resist the opportunity to take a tilt at the medical profession, "Please hand the enclosed to your daughter-in-law. Why did you let Murray take all those tip top degrees? He won't be allowed to speak to you professionally, and he will not earn enough to marry until he is 45, so I conclude that Unity Louise has lashings of money. If not, she will have to work for his living." Unity Louise did not have lashings of money, and house surgeons at St Thomas's

On 2 August 1950 Shaw wrote in his final letter to Pheils:

I am all right except my legs, which are so groggy that I can only walk round the garden with a stick, and an attack of lumbago which you could perhaps have cured, but failing you I had to try radiant heat. Finally I left it to Nature, which did the trick slowly.

were unpaid at that time; then we were both swept up in the tides of war, and we survived. I think Shaw would be pleased to know that we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary in 1991.

In 1950 my father developed congestive cardiac failure. The last card he received from Shaw was dated 2 August 1950. The card shows a shaky but clear handwriting. "For heart trouble walk up to the Beacon three times a day [the beacon is the summit of the Malvern Hills]. No immobilization: no whisky. Cut out protein and live on raw vegetables as I do. Too much nitrogen is killing the human race." Shaw died on 2 November 1950, and my father lived on until 1952, continuing to work almost to the end.

The correspondence between Shaw and my father, the inscribed copy of *St Joan*, and a signed photograph of Shaw are all now held by the Fisher Library, Sydney University, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.

1 Shaw GB. The case of Dr Axham. *Times* 1925 Oct 23.

2 Shaw GB. *Doctors' delusions*. London: Constable, 1931:112.

3 Holroyd M. *Bernard Shaw*. Vol 3. London: Chatto and Windus, 1991:168.

Medicine and the Gulag

Igor Kosserev, Ralph Crawshaw

The nature of the medical treatment of prisoners in the Gulag has emerged from accounts published by survivors. Over a period of 70 years some doctors entrusted with the medical care of prisoners failed to discharge their ethical duties, contributing to the prisoners' neglect and suffering. The medical profession must carefully examine what occurred and properly assign responsibility for ethical as well as unethical medical acts. Understanding the history of these ominous events will alert doctors worldwide to the importance of medical autonomy in the support of imprisoned patients.

After the 1917 October Revolution millions of Russians were unlawfully imprisoned in their country, tortured and often incarcerated in the Gulag for long periods.¹ Their medical care devolved on prison doctors, some of whom under political tyranny failed to discharge their traditional role as protectors and advocates of patients.² This paper examines the ethical and unethical behaviour of prison physicians largely on the basis of surviving personal accounts, and it calls for a fully documented study to alert medical practitioners everywhere who may be under political or institutional duress to remain vigilant to their power to harm.

The Gulag

The Gulag did not spring unbidden from virgin soil. Russia has a long history of an oppressive penal system; it goes back to 1724 with the reforms of Peter the Great, who fostered a policy that "the police are the soul of the people."³ Subsequent tsars elaborated on the concept

of a police state by using the vast area of Siberia as a prison without bars. Ostensibly, medical services in the Russian prisons and labour camps of the times were on a par with what the general population could expect, without any systematic use of doctors as agents of government discipline.⁴ If V I Lenin's experience of three years' detention in Siberia is an example it was nothing like the labour camps of the Gulag. He had complete freedom of the province for he lived in a small home where he could entertain guests, correspond, study, write, and even marry.⁵ This liberal treatment of prisoners changed for the worse once the Communist revolutionaries took over the penal system.

Founded in 1922 as a political expedient of the Soviet government, the Gulag, a Russian acronym for the chief administration of corrective labour camps, consisted of a system of prison camps strung out across the Soviet Union.⁶ No one can be certain how many prisoners were held without recourse or what nations they came from because important documents were lost or destroyed; some investigators estimate as many as 20 million people have been held as political prisoners.⁷

For more than a half century the vast "archipelago" of prisons was unaccountable to any but the supreme dictator, Stalin, and his successors. Among its functionaries were doctors employed to care for the system's staff and, almost as an afterthought, for the medical and surgical needs of the prisoners. Some doctors were assigned for the military or had volunteered, others were themselves prisoners. Though many thousands of doctors were involved, the precise

Moscow Medical Academy
of IM Sechenov, Moscow,
Russia

Igor Kosserev, professor of
pedagogic and medical
psychology

Russian Academy of
Natural Sciences, Moscow
Ralph Crawshaw, foreign
member

Correspondence to:
Dr R Crawshaw,
Department of Psychiatry,
Oregon Health Sciences
University, Portland,
OR 97201, USA.

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