

Berlin was the Capital of the Kaiser's Germany in the first decades of the 20th century, when my father started to practise medicine from his home. The society in which he lived and worked was a very stratified one. The Kaiser, his courtiers, the hereditary aristocracy and the Prussian Military were the very top caste, below them wealthy industrialists, then the professional classes with University Professors considered the elite of that caste. Employees, civil servants and the lower middle classes followed in this hierarchy, with the working classes at the lowest level of this structure.

Upward movement, driven by ambition, greed and need, was rare, slow and difficult, although there were few official barriers. Jews, however, were barred from certain professions, from a military career, and only a very rare minor elevation to the lower aristocracy occurred, when the title *von (Freiherr)* was bestowed; for example, the owner of the private bank Franz von Mendelssohn, whose family however, had been christened a century earlier.

My father's patients belonged to the professional middle classes, with perhaps an occasional exception, above or below this stratum. More frequent, in his later years, were patients from the American and British Embassies, and there was also the occasional *Freiherr* and *Freifrau*. Similarly, his circle of friends belonged to the professional middle class, again with the occasional exception like the Mendelssohn family, who were both friends and patients. It appears to me that in those distant days of class distinction and great dangers from any serious illness, friendships between doctor and patient often grew very quickly from medical consultations. I remember that just before Christmas, many presents arrived at home, particularly wines, bottles of liqueurs and other delicacies.

A further reason for this often close medical-social relationship was the fact that my father visited the homes of his patients, mostly children, and thus soon became well known to their parents. In case of urgent need, a telephone call from a harassed mother in the middle of the night was always immediately followed by a visit to the bedside of the child. How my father travelled in the middle of the night through the Berlin of those days can now only be reconstructed in my imagination.

I do know that my father never owned, nor drove, a motorcar throughout his life. With public transport shut down at night, he must have started walking and considered himself lucky if he found a horse-drawn *Droschke*, a taxi, that took him to his destination. No wonder, that grateful parents or patients, sent him lavish Christmas presents.