The famous Turkish obstetrician and pediatrician, Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha (1862-1940) spent the first half of his life during the declining years of the Ottoman Empire (nineteenth century) and the other half, during the revolutionary period of the early Turkish Republic (1920's). Prof. Dr. Besim Ömer Akalin is mainly known for his remarkable contributions and works in obstetrics and pediatrics; and also for his fundamental texts for the education of midwives and nurses in Turkey, besides his professional and administrative duties in health affairs. He dedicated his life to the development of systems of education in medicine and allied sciences, specifically in the health of mothers and children. He also placed importance on public education in sanitation, giving birth, bringing up healthy newborns and infants through his popular writings(6). Dr. Besim Ömer was also a prominent figure in the revival of the Red Crescent Society in Turkey by reestablishing and reorganizing its main activities together with his colleagues(3), (5).

Dr. Akalin completed his postdoctoral studies at the clinics of obstetrics directed by Prof. Tarnier and Prof. P. Budin, and at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris (1887-1891). During his years there, he compiled his notes on prenatal and newborn health care in a book called Soins à donner aux enfants nés faibles et avant terme: La Couveuse et La Gavage (Istanbul, 1889)(1). This work was the first Turkish medical book on newborn hygiene and care. It discussed the latest advances in the field during the last decades of the 19th century. Dr. Akalin introduced through his book, the use of incubator treatment and probed feeding methods developed by Prof. Tarnier in order to decrease infant mortality.(2). The publication of this book has been described as a giant step in obstetric and pediatric education in Turkey during the Ottoman Empire (7).

Its front cover was printed in Ottoman Turkish letters and its back cover was in French. The book starts with 13 introductory pages of Prof. Budin where he draws attention to contemporary developments in medical science and technology, medical inventions, and new procedures in surgery and obstetrics. He describes the use of invasive procedures in neonatal care in order to decrease infant mortality, based on new findings concerning the respiratory, digestive, and excretory systems of the newborns and infants. He emphasizes the role of incubators and feeding probes. Budin also praises Dr. Besim Ömer as one of the most talented and diligent assistants who ever worked at his clinic; and he celebrates the publication of this book, specifically focused on the pediatric care of premature babies (4).

In his foreword, Dr. Besim Ömer gives information on novel techniques, medicaments and devices facilitating surgery and post-operative care such as surgical antisepsis. He draws attention to the decreasing trend of mortality of newborns and women after childbirth owing to the successful management of some fatal pediatric diseases such as sclerama, conjunctivitis, and diarrhea. He describes the newly-discovered apparatus of the incubator (couveuse) as a means to provide the premature infant with a natural ambience to survive. The incubator is described as a reanimating device to supply the underdeveloped premature baby with a para-natural environment similar to a cradle in which he can develop his vital functions such as breathing, sucking and so on. The author adds that the infant mortality was lessened by 0,044 due to the life-saving effect of incubators at that time (2)

In the following chapters, premature childbirth, abortion, low-weighted newborns and their body temperature; acute diseases of premature babies; respiratory, digestive, intestinal, excretory
disorders for newborns; diarrhea, puerperal fever and other infectious diseases, eclampsia, hemorrhage are dealt with.

Finally, he discusses the technical features of an incubator with regard to infant hygiene, inner conditions, nutrition, and medical care of the baby inside it. The importance of breastfeeding and accompanying problems are also treated by vivid illustrations.

This book was a decisive and major achievement in Turkish medical history in the 19th century.

1. (Akalin) Besim Ömer. (1889). Zayif ve Vakitsiz doğan çocuklara edilecek Tekayyûdat: Kuvöz ve Gavaj (Medical care for the premature infants), Mahmud Bey Matbaası, İstanbul-Turkey.

2. (Akalin) Besim Ömer. (1889). Zayif ve Vakitsiz... pp: 11-21. Starting with his years in Paris, the assistant-professor relationship between Dr. Besim Ömer and Prof. Pierre Budin evolved into a close friendship over the course of time. Dr. Besim Ömer translated Budin's clinical book of obstetrics from French into Turkish as Seririyat-i Viladiye Dersleri (Courses on obstetrics), written by Prof. Dr. Pierre Budin, translated by Dr Besim Ömer, Istanbul, 1895, 550 pages (illustrated). In this book he inserted the photograph of Dr. Budin, by addressing him as "My professor and my dear friend" in order to introduce Prof. Budin to his students at the Medical Faculty.


4. Budin P. 1313 (1895), Seririyat-i Viladiye Dersleri (A Coursebook of Obstetrics), translated by Besim Ömer, the professor obstetrics and gynecology at the Medical Faculty, Istanbul, Mekteb-i Tibbiye-i Sahane Matbaası, 550 pages illustrated.


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