

### Book Reviews

colony. From the 1850s onwards, the population became dense enough to sustain epidemic diseases spread by person to person contact.

Gandevia discusses both the epidemiological and the institutional aspects of child welfare in Australia. He examines a variety of specific institutions, such as children's hospitals, orphanages, and schools, relating several local case-studies to national legislation concerning such matters as childhood employment and family allowances. The book demonstrates his excellent grasp of both printed and archival sources, and though there are no footnotes, Gandevia does provide specific chapter references. His account of the recent past is necessarily sketchy, but the final chapters outline the main events in the professionalization of paediatrics in Australia, its development as an academic subject, and a few Australian contributions to the specialty. Of the latter, the most famous is probably Sir Norman McAister Gregg's 1941 demonstration of birth defects among children of mothers contracting rubella in the early months of pregnancy.

ROSEMARY WHITE, *Social change and the development of the nursing profession. A study of the Poor Law nursing services 1848-1948*, London, Henry Kimpton, 1978, 8vo, pp. xi, 243, £6.80.

The author is a highly-qualified nurse who here traces the evolution of her profession in relation to social influences. She is concerned primarily with Poor Law nurses, whose history has not been recorded as fully as others. She uses a wide variety of primary sources in addition to a rich background of works on nursing, medical, and social history. Her textual material is fully referenced, so that the pioneer excavations she has carried out can be of benefit to those who follow.

Although her handling of some of the medical advances of the nineteenth century shows some flaws, the author has produced a stimulating book which will be of wide appeal to those in the health services and historical fields.

PHILIP ABRAMS and E. A. WRIGLEY (editors), *Towns in societies. Essays in economic history and economic sociology*, Cambridge University Press, 1978, 8vo, pp. viii, 344, £7.95.

The prestigious series of Past and Present publications presents another important title. There are twelve scholarly essays by experts, given originally at a conference in 1975 or previously published in *Past and Present*. They tend to refute the thesis that there exists a specifically urban contribution to history. The town must be regarded as a social construct rather than a social entity, and a more dynamic view of urban history and sociology developed. Evidence is presented from the early Roman Empire, China, early medieval Europe, English provincial town decline or development in the late middle ages and the eighteenth century, Genoa in the thirteenth century, Florence in 1427, London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and German cities just before industrialization.

These papers present a challenging new approach and will, it is to be hoped, stimulate further research into a significant re-interpretation of the history and sociology of towns. It provides the medical historian with an excellent backdrop against which much of medicine evolved.