

Book Reviews

Doctors and the State: The British Medical Profession and Government Action, by JEANNE L. BRAND, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966, pp. xiii, 307, illus., 64s.

This study was made by an American, an authority on the contemporary welfare services of her own country. It is significant that people from areas where the necessity and urgency for establishing some national health care is realized should embark upon detailed research into our past, to avoid our mistakes, to recognize and understand existing problems, or to forestall future blunders.

Nineteenth-century England witnessed an amazing development in State intervention. The problems posed by industrialization, urbanization and a rapid growth in population made this activity inevitable and progressive. Local and central government took on many new functions, so that reform and expansion in the administrative and executive systems was imperative for effective operation. An efficient civil service and specialists became very necessary. Regarding public health measures, demand and supply reached significant dimensions with the institution of State medical employees who could provide information for public inquiries (a new departure) and for action to be taken subsequently. Progress was assured when the expert on health could reveal officially that an unhealthy people affected economic prosperity and that ill-health cost the nation more than positive measures to ensure good health.

Doctors cannot escape their close connection with the community. They were in the last century the one single group in a key position able to observe and to analyse the social evils which existed; they were foremost in recognizing what must be done. Generally aloof from, and therefore unbiassed by political and economic philosophy or practice, they provided one of the great elements in the movement for reform in social welfare. Unfortunately they have received too little historic recognition. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the State doctors formed a new branch of the medical profession, and with the strength which organization gave to them, made forceful demands to improve their status within the country and to achieve recognition within the profession. In assessing the value of their work their dependence on the emergence of another new branch of the profession, the medical scientist and the government-sponsored research-worker, must also be taken into account.

This book deals primarily with the development of the Public Health services, in which field members of an extremely independent calling, not only accepted central control but demanded it, at first in the prevention of epidemic diseases and later in securing personal care within the community framework. Albeit doctors did desire more professional representation and always demanded a greater degree of responsibility to medical supervision and an effective medical superior. In their criticism of lay control the State doctors were right in diagnosing the cause of the slowness in the improvement in Public Health. Had legislation been acted upon immediately and efficiently the picture presented by the country by the turn of the century would have been very different, but there were only a few laymen with the necessary understanding and knowledge in government departments or local councils.

Dr. Brand gives us a detailed story of Public Health legislation and informative

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notes on the well-known personalities involved. Some account of the 'unknown' local doctors and their efforts and ideas would have given greater life and variety to the picture. The activity of the Medical Department of the Local Government Board is outlined and the general work of the Medical Officers of Health is described at length. In addition we are given a brief survey of the Military and Colonial Medical Departments and the Poor Law Medical Service. It is very unfortunate that only 21 pages are devoted to the latter and that once again this important other half of State medicine has not been given the attention it merits. The Poor Law Medical Officer was the first public doctor on a national scale and played a significant part in the development of the State medical services.

The author's evaluation of medical research and of the influence of the British Medical Association and the medical journals make important and interesting reading. An inclusion of more statistics on many topics would have been very useful and would have made arguments and generalizations more compelling. The part played by the private practitioner and his gradual involvement with the growing provision of medical care for the poor through early insurance schemes lead to the important discussion of the National Insurance Act of 1911. By this time the whole concept of the need, desirability and possibility of a national health plan was coming to the fore. The tremendous publicity given to the Reports of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1905-9 and the propaganda writings of those concerned with them made the country as a whole aware for the first time of the problems and the urgent need for their solution. Since that time the relation between the Doctor and the Government has altered radically. In the advance towards the Welfare State there has been no retrogression.

A continuation of the book would have to embrace the third quantity omitted here—a new force—the people. In concluding her study with a quick survey of the American scene, Dr. Brand states that 'health is purchasable—in large part.' Having to face the issue of a national health policy in the mid-twentieth century, America has the advantage that the people are knowledgeable and articulate. So her work will convince many of them that despite the differences between our two countries, the lesson is that national health in its widest ramifications can only be purchased through national effort, and by using national funds on a national scale.

It may be that similar accounts of our own age, however specialized the subject, will in future have a wider base because the people are deeply involved, and that they will contain more of the human side of the social history of medicine, clothing cold facts with an element of broad human values, of actual living experiences, aspirations, successes or defeats. This above all would give an added reason for research in this field and make it even more satisfying to write and to read.

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A History of Ideas about the Prolongation of Life: The Evolution of the Prolongevity Hypothesis to 1800, by GERALD J. GRUMAN, *Trans. Amer. phil. Soc.*, 1966, 56, part 9, pp. 102, \$3.00.

Professor Gruman's study is a compendium of useful quotation for future writers on the subject of human attitudes towards long life. His approach is historical, with little attempt to integrate the wish for Methusalic performance with folk attitudes