

Book Reviews

(1919–1923), as models of wise policy and sensible treatment. They can, and should, function as beacons for contemporary reformers.

I have a few quarrels with Professor Trebach. I do not think that the British experience with narcotic drugs is as applicable to America as he does. And I think that his view of the past tends to be too narrowly legal. But these are minor reservations about a splendid book. While this is not a history book, it contains a great deal of good history. And the uses that Professor Trebach makes of the past are, like his book as a whole, intelligent and humane.

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JOHN FRY, LORD HUNT OF FAWLEY, and R. J. F. H. PINSENT (editors), *A history of the Royal College of General Practitioners. The first 25 years*, London, MTP Press, 1983, 8vo. pp. xiii, 270, illus., £9.95.

This book consists of twenty-two independent chapters by a variety of authors, documenting the development of different aspects of the Royal College of General Practitioners over the last twenty-five years. These chapters cover topics from the College's formation to a history of the College insignia, and most have been written by College luminaries who were personally involved in the events they describe. On the one hand, this proximity of its authors to recent events provides a very readable book with much fascinating, if at times trivial, background detail. On the other hand, this intimate acquaintance with events has precluded a more distant – and perhaps more critical – assessment of the College's first twenty-five years.

It might be expected that participants in the College's history would be able to offer unique insights into events, and yet perhaps one of the most remarkable things about the book is the absence of private observation. The College, of course, was founded at a time when such events were part and parcel of the public domain, whether in the correspondence columns of medical journals or in the College's own formal records, so that, for example, in the history of the College's formation very little is added to what is available for all to see in the columns of the *Lancet* and *BMJ* at the time. What new detail is provided tends to describe where dinner was eaten or who provided it: this enriches the narrative but is hardly of historical importance.

This is very much a history of individual accomplishments. The authors themselves achieved and personally knew others who achieved. There was an obvious camaraderie between these people, but it means that the history of the College is one of gifted and prescient men (and a few women) who fortuitously came together and gave birth to a College. There is some hint of controversy and opposition in the chapters on the College's formation, but otherwise conflict is a theme noticeably absent. Indeed, even those who opposed the College tend to be shadowy, nameless people; when they are named they are members of the medical establishment such as Brain, Wakley, and Horder – though even they are reported to have joined the angels by renouncing their opposition once the College was formed.

The other effect of a "great men" approach is the total neglect of the socio-political dimension. General practice seemed to exist in a vacuum and the GP Charter, the British Medical Association, the government, the National Health Service, or the social climate receive barely a mention. There is undoubtedly a history of general practice in the post-war years to be written, but this is not it. On the other hand, to be fair, neither would it claim to be: as the dust-jacket proclaims the book is a "reminder" that will lead the reader "to be entranced". If this is not a good history, it is certainly an excellent celebration.

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WILLIAM REY ARNEY, *Power and the profession of obstetrics*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xi, 290, £20.00.

In the literature on the "medicalization" of women's health care over the last three centuries, two issues have emerged: why did it happen, in the sense of whether the doctors who "gained control" were fiendish schemers or well-meaning humanitarians?; and what consequences did it have for the women themselves? Have they overall been gainers or losers from the shift of