

century, though many papers extend into the twentieth, with one paper on eighteenth-century Carolina, which sits rather awkwardly with the others, because of its very different social and intellectual context.

Such collections cannot hope to cover everything, and the editors apologize for obvious gaps in coverage, especially in Asia, the West Indies, and Africa, but the range is impressive nonetheless. The editors also disclaim any unifying thesis or central argument, but Roy MacLeod's excellent introduction suggests a number of linking themes, and even as he anticipates reviewers' likely complaints about lacunae he adroitly points the way ahead for further work in this field.

Part I is mainly concerned with the tropical frontier and begins with Michael Worboys's discussion of the rivalry between the London and Liverpool schools of tropical medicine, seen through the contrasting approaches of Manson and Ross to colonial medical policy. Radhika Ramasubban writes on British India, dealing with army sanitary reform and cholera. One curious omission from this useful study is any reference to the key article by I. D. Mills on the 1918 influenza pandemic in India (*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23: 1 (1986), 1–40). Raeburn Lange's well-balanced discussion of the Cook Islands under New Zealand colonial administration encapsulates several key themes of this collection, and enables interesting comparisons to be made with Wolfgang Eckart's paper on German Pacific territories and Anne Marcovich's on French Algeria and Indochina.

Part II, entitled 'European medicine and colonial practice', deals with selected "white" colonies of the temperate zones, and is mainly concerned with the development of the medical profession in South Carolina, Canada, Queensland, and Victoria (Australia). Donald Denoon contributes a lively overview of the reception of Western medical ideas in settler societies. One paper is posthumous: it was sad to hear of Geoffrey Bilson's death in 1987. Part III is subtitled 'The politics of race and epidemic disease', and includes well-written case studies of smallpox in Australia by Alan Mayne, sleeping sickness in the Belgian Congo by Maryinez Lyons, and cholera in the Philippines by Rodney Sullivan. A lively chapter by Shula Marks and Neil Andersson on typhus in South Africa begins with reference to outbreaks of cholera in the Bantustans in the early 1980s, a reminder that the social and political histories of medicine can have considerable present-day relevance. Milton Lewis concludes the volume with a study of infant welfare in New South Wales. Though he discusses Truby King and New Zealand's developments in this field, no mention is made of Philippa Mein Smith's excellent new account, *Maternity in dispute* (Wellington, 1986).

This is a useful and substantial collection, which amply fulfils its stated objectives. The papers vary somewhat in quality, but all are based on thorough research in primary sources, and the overall standard is high. The editors deserve congratulations for a job well done. The bibliography is a very comprehensive listing, which illustrates the range of recent work, but the index is largely confined to names, and needed a much stronger subject analysis to make it useful for students and researchers. Even so, the use of section headings throughout each chapter makes it easy to find one's way around the book.

Geoffrey W. Rice, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

CHARLES WEBSTER, *The health services since the War*, vol. 1, *Problems of health care: the National Health Service before 1957*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988, 8vo, pp. x, 479, £27.50.

For all its much-vaunted faults Britain's National Health Service remains the most ambitious publicly provided health service to be established by a Western democracy. And, as current events show, there is a formidable consensus of opinion, professional and lay, in its favour. Things were not always thus: as Charles Webster emphasizes in his account of the NHS up to 1957, historically there has often been little consensus and the present set-up has evolved out of a long series of painful battles and compromises, with the medical view taking the ascendant. There are good reasons for the latter: the British Medical Association, in Webster's

view, was hell-bent on revenge for the debacle of 1911 when it had lost out in negotiations with Lloyd George over the National Insurance Act, and the one Civil Servant who had had the dynamism and the vision to stir the Ministry of Health out of its usual caution and lethargy died prematurely right at the start of planning, in 1920. (And, if besides Bevan, one is looking for heroes in the story Webster does make a case for two other, unrecognized, figures: firstly, the visionary Sir Robert Morant, the first Permanent Secretary to the Ministry, and, secondly, J. S. Collings, a visiting Australian GP, whose 1950 *Lancet* report of the truly awful state of British general practice did more than anything else to lead to the reforms that make it possibly the best in the world today.)

Webster is right, then, in allocating three of his nine chapters to the period before the NHS was introduced, given that it explains so many of the early difficulties, some of which persist even today. Thus, in pre-war London, an expectant mother had no fewer than nine different routes to confinement, only two new mental hospitals were built between the wars, and dental care was described as a national breakdown service. Health and welfare spending was only 1.8 per cent of GNP while the annual subsidies on sugar beet cost £2 million more than the school medical service and maternity and child welfare provision. Though with the introduction of the NHS absolute spending increased considerably, such was the backlog of skimped maintenance and underprovided resources, not to mention the unanticipated demand by patients for items such as spectacles, hearing aids, and dentures, that some aspects got relatively worse, especially in the hospital service. For example the report by Abel-Smith and Titmuss to the Guillebaud Committee, set up to look into (baseless) allegations of extravagance and ever-rising costs—a depressing, continuing leitmotiv of the NHS—found that in 1952–3 not only was capital expenditure extremely low but that relatively it was only a third of that pre-war. Moreover, whereas the ratio of capital to current expenditure in 1938–9 had been 19.6 per cent, by 1952–3 it was 4.1 per cent—compared with 23.4 per cent for the USA. This had to be set against much larger proportionate increases for both housing and education, which, along with defence, got the lion's share of national expenditure. As a result, Webster comments, the first twelve years of the National Health Service made no contribution to the hospital modernization programme at all. The mentally ill came off even worse, with expenditure on community services in 1961 being less than the compensation for fowl pest.

In any history of NHS policy it is important, as Webster does, to emphasize these seemingly prosaic considerations because they explain much of the mess the British health service is in today. What grips the public, on the other hand, are the human aspects: five-minutes-to-midnight negotiations between Bevan and the BMA (with Lord Moran as a sort of medical *deus-ex-machina*), the Cabinet disputes between Morrison and Bevan over municipal control of hospitals, or Bevan's resignation over health service charges. But, rightly, much of Webster's book is devoted to the unremitting campaign by the Treasury to contain expenditure, with a total cost of £400 million assuming "totemic significance" at one point, and reiterated calls for cuts by successive Chancellors of the Exchequer as each new financial crisis hit the country.

Another theme of this comprehensive book must be the poverty of intelligence, the lack of valid data on almost any aspect of NHS costs, something the British are still having to live with today. But the result, it must be said, is more than a certain aridity. Most of Webster's history reads like the blue book format in which it is published and, though Civil Servants would find little untoward in his prose, most of the uncommitted trying to read this for pleasure or profit would find the going hard—for example, "Although disappointed by the prospect of statutory local authority responsibility for the future hospital service, voluntary hospital representatives acquiesced in Johnston's proposal to establish a committee to investigate means of realising the goals described in Brown's ministerial statement." Webster can write well: his concluding exegesis, ten pages of brilliant encapsulation of almost 40 years' activity, is testimony to that. His second volume will presumably show how the service came not only to be accepted but loved. If it is to be as widely read as it should be, he should remember that his readers will be happier with the prose style of his Conclusions than that of the rest of the book.

Stephen Lock, *British Medical Journal*