

THE BULLETIN

OF THE

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

COLLEGE NEWS

PRESIDENT'S PRESS

One of my Presidential duties is to be a member of the Joint Consultants Committee which for years has been the principal interface between the DHSS and the consultant branch of the profession. Being a new boy in medical politics I thought some background reading necessary and so turned to the few books other than biographies that are relevant. C. P. Snow's *Science and Government* is one of his better long-short stories, with the air of verisimilitude heightened by the fact that the two main characters—Lindemann and Tizard—actually existed. Lord Brain's *Medicine and Government* is a posthumously published lecture which I found in some ways curiously disappointing, as I had expected that a man of his great wisdom, encyclopedic knowledge and long experience at the very summit of medical politics would have produced a more philosophical and reflective essay. Nevertheless his account

of the relationship between medicine and government in the years up to 1966 needs little alteration to be relevant to the situation today. Few of the major issues, such as the resources and organisation of health care or the pay and status of doctors are nearer satisfactory solution. Indeed, Lord Brian reminds us that early on in the history of the Royal College of Physicians—in 1583 to be precise—the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London asked the College's advice on how many and what sort of doctors were needed to deal with the plague and how they were to be paid. Perhaps these fundamental questions have therefore to be answered differently in every generation, with social changes playing a larger part in their formulation and solution than advances in scientific knowledge and consequent changes in medical practice.

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