

doi:10.1017/mdh.2016.122

Merrilyn Murnane, *Honourable Healers: Pioneering Women Doctors Elizabeth Blackwell, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Constance Stone*, (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2015), pp. xvi, 225, A \$33.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-1925-333-053.

Beulah Bewley, *My Life as a Woman and Doctor*, Susan Bewley (ed.) (Bristol: SilverWood, 2016), pp. 235, £25.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-78132-419-6.

Merrilyn Murnane and Beulah Bewley share a common objective which is to provide encouragement for the next generation of women physicians. Murnane, a medical student in the 1950s, explains that her ‘ultimate purpose . . . is to encourage the rising generation of women doctors to appreciate the struggles of the founding women of medicine in the English speaking world’ (p. 201). Murnane recalls her ignorance of the battles waged by her nineteenth-century predecessors in their efforts to study medicine. Likewise, Bewley, who first studied medicine at Trinity College, Dublin from 1947 to 1953, wrote a memoir, recounting her personal story to be ‘helpful’ to women who wish to pursue careers in science and medicine.

Honourable Healers is a narrative about female firsts in medicine. This inspirational story of four (even though the title only names three) nineteenth- to early twentieth-century female physicians, Elizabeth Blackwell (1821–1910), Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836–1917), Sophia-Jex Blake (1840–1912), and the less well-known Emma Constance Stone (1856–1902), is intended for clinicians and the general public rather than an academic audience. As a physician, Murnane, a retired paediatrician who had an illustrious medical career of her own – she was made a member of the Order of Australia in 2003 for service to medicine – comes to the history of medicine from the perspective of a clinician rather than an academic. Murnane became a very successful doctor when very few women practised medicine. Now a retired physician, she works in Papua New Guinea with special needs children in addition to funding scholarships for girls to pursue medical careers. Murnane’s own life story fits well with her narrative about trail-blazing women as does that of Irish doctor and scholar Beulah Bewley. Bewley’s autobiography is discussed later in this review.

The foreword of *Honourable Healers*, written by Ann Blainey, correctly states that although much has been written in the recent past about exemplary Australian women in history, one cannot say the same about Australian women doctors. As a highly readable and accessible account, the book fills a void in the literature especially with respect to the first Australian woman physician Emma Constance Stone, largely unknown to readers beyond this country.

The central organising principle of *Honourable Healers* is the common culture shared by these women physicians which includes their Christian heritage, and their common struggles against systemic discrimination of women who desired a medical career. Most importantly, despite numerous hurdles, these women achieved their goal of becoming very successful physicians. They made contributions to medicine in the form of serving poor women and children in clinics initially, and later in hospitals which they founded. A further unifying factor amongst these talented and brave women was the tremendous impact Blackwell, Garrett Anderson, Jex-Blake and Stone had on medicine for women who followed in their footsteps.

In the Preface, Murnane acknowledges that there is ample literature on Blackwell and Jex-Blake and that she relies rather heavily on previous studies. The author might have consulted the most recent scholarly literature including Claire Brock’s 2008 article on Garrett Anderson and Jex-Blake in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* and E. Crawford’s monograph, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and their Circles* (2009).

Murnane states that her purpose is not to re-write their lives, but 'to bring together in one narrative these four lives to show how they faced and overcame common challenges and difficulties, and garnered support from colleagues, partners and friends' (p. xvi). A further goal of Murnane is to demonstrate that these women received support from each other and from the more liberal-thinking men of the day.

There are eight chapters in this book. Chapter 1, 'Footsteps in the sands of time: the early history of women in medicine', sketches the history of women in medicine stretching back to Sumer, where women were known as 'honourable healers' – hence the title of the book. Although interesting, the chapter relies too heavily on two dated sources, Kate Campbell Hurd-Mead's, *A History of Women in Medicine* (1938) and Nutting and Dock's classic *A History of Nursing* (1907).

Chapters 2 to 5 concern the four women who are the focus of the book, Blackwell, Garrett Anderson, Jex-Blake (whose name is oddly not in the book's title) and Stone. Chapter 2 provides a recitation of generally well-known biographical details of Elizabeth Blackwell in forty-seven pages based primarily upon Blackwell's own autobiography, *Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women* (1895). Although born in Bristol in England, Blackwell, an 1849 graduate of New York's Geneva Medical College, was America's first female doctor. Another first for Blackwell was the opening of New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1857. Obstetrics and gynaecology were Blackwell's specialities.

Readers learn that Blackwell was an unlikely candidate for medicine, which was not a career choice for women at this time. Before turning to medicine, Blackwell, like many contemporaries, did a stint in the more acceptable profession of teaching. As a young woman, Blackwell had no interest in medicine, writing that she 'hated everything connected with the body, and could not bear the sight of a medical book . . . My favourite studies were history and metaphysics, and the very thought of dwelling on the physical structure of the body and its various ailments filled me with disgust' (p. 26 n. 10). Blackwell explained that only when a close friend was dying did she turn to medicine.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the valiant struggles of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Jex-Blake, which have largely been covered elsewhere in full-length biographies and journal articles. Garrett Anderson was the English equivalent of Blackwell in that she was the first woman doctor in the United Kingdom. Personal connections and support amongst female medical pioneers assisted Garrett Anderson's struggle to become an MD. Blackwell and English feminist Emily Davies met with Garrett Anderson to convince her to study medicine. With medical schools closed to women, Garrett Anderson worked as a surgery nurse at Middlesex Hospital in London, and attended medical lectures intended for male medical students until she was barred from them due to complaints from male students. She was refused entry into the medical school and told to go the USA for her degree. Undaunted, Garrett Anderson did not give up and found a loophole in the Society of Apothecaries' regulations where she received a medical certificate which allowed her to practise in 1865. Subsequently the society changed its rules to formally prohibit women from this avenue to becoming physicians.

Like other women under consideration in this book, Garrett Anderson was successful in opening a dispensary for women, and after completing a medical degree in Paris in 1870, she opened a hospital for women in London and appointed Blackwell, her mentor, as a professor of gynaecology. Garrett Anderson was the first female MD from the Sorbonne. Similarly, Jex-Blake, the first woman to practise medicine in Scotland, led a campaign with six other women to study medicine after she had been admitted to the University of Edinburgh in 1869. Once again, hostility from male students would impede the study of

medicine for Jex Blake and other women. The animosity from male students eventually led to a riot and the university refused to graduate the famous 'Edinburgh Seven' (Jex-Blake and six fellow women medical students) in 1873. Jex-Blake obtained her MD from the University of Berne in 1877 and her licence to practise from King's and Queen's College of Physicians, Dublin. She established medical colleges for women in London (1874) and Edinburgh (1886).

Of particular interest are Chapters 5 to 8, which cover the history of women in medicine in Australia with particular emphasis on Emma Constance Stone, the first woman doctor in Australia. Oddly, Stone, the physician who has been the least studied, receives the shortest biographical chapter of only ten pages. The most original and interesting section of the text concerns the life and achievements of Stone, who was not only Australia's first woman physician, but principal founder of the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. Stone's parents were English immigrants to Australia who settled in Hobart in Tasmania in 1854. Her father built pipe organs and her mother was a governess. A family friend, the Welsh clergyman David Egryn Jones, later Stone's husband, sparked her interest in medicine. They shared a dedication to helping the sick poor. In common with her contemporaries who are the subject of this book, Stone faced the inevitable systemic obstacles when it came to studying medicine involving leaving her native Australia and studying and working in foreign countries before returning home. Women were not admitted to medical schools in Australia until 1887. In the 1880s, Stone had no other choice than to study abroad in the USA. She attended the Women's Medical School in Philadelphia for three years from 1884 to 1887, graduating with an MD. After a six-month residency at a women's and children's hospital at Staten Island, New York, Stone studied at Trinity College in the University of Toronto for one year and was awarded the MD ChM with Honours. She studied in Canada because she required a 'British' qualification to practise in Melbourne. Her next move was to the Royal Free Hospital, the New Hospital for Women where she qualified with a Licentiate from the Society of Apothecaries. After gaining this qualification, she worked with her mentor Elizabeth Garrett Anderson as an assistant in the outpatients wing of the New Hospital for Women which Garrett Anderson had founded in 1871. This hospital was staffed completely by female physicians, nurses and dispensers.

What is made clear by Murnane is that Garrett Anderson's hospital was an inspiration for Stone to establish her own institution which she would later do on her return to Australia. In 1889, Stone left England for Melbourne where she was registered as the first female doctor on 7 February 1890. Her greatest achievement would be the establishment of the Queen Victoria Hospital with the help of several other women, including her younger sister Clara and cousin Mary, also physicians. The hospital's story is the subject of Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 7 provides brief biographies of the founding female doctors of the Queen Victoria Hospital. In addition to their successful medical careers, the three Stone women were also activists. On 22 March 1895, with eleven other female physicians, they founded the Victorian Medical Women's Society in Constance's home. The purposes of the VMWS was twofold: to forge closer ties between medical women graduates and undergraduates and to advance the interests of women in medicine.

Chapter 8, 'Gentlemen, the ladies have come to stay', provides a sketch of the opening of the Australian medical schools to women and those who were the first female medical students. Although the content is interesting, the chapter strays from the book's focus which is the three (really four) protagonists, Blackwell, Garrett Anderson, Jex-Blake and Stone. The book concludes with an Epilogue where Murnane states that her 'ultimate purpose in writing this book is to encourage the rising generation of women doctors to appreciate the struggles of the founding women in medicine in the English-speaking

world' (p. 201). Two pages of notes, a brief bibliography and an index conclude the text; several pages of illustrations enhance it.

Readers will not find many of the standard features of a scholarly monograph which include theoretical analysis, in this case an analysis of gender theory and a review of the existing literature. Murnane does not address such questions as how these pioneering female physicians enhance our understanding of strategies undertaken by medical women engaged in 'gender performance' as defined by theorist Judith Butler. The author does not engage the scholarly literature and state how this work relates to and expands upon previous studies on pioneering female physicians during this period. The use of archival sources, namely the private papers of the subjects, would have enhanced the book. The author does use printed primary sources such as diaries, autobiographies and newspapers, but relies rather substantially on secondary material.

However, the book is a worthwhile contribution to the history of women in medicine in the nineteenth century. In particular, Murnane is excellent when recounting the myriad battles and painful struggles the four women overcame with grace and dignity. Overall, the book does provide an excellent introduction to the lives of four pioneering female physicians and important female networks which were essential to these women's success. The narrative is written from the perspective of a highly successful practitioner rather than an academic. A full length scholarly biography of Emma Constance Stone is a serious gap in the scholarship of Victorian women physicians. This reviewer encourages the author to fill this gap.

With the very personal and captivating story of Beulah Bewley's exceptional life and career, the reader moves into the world of medicine in Ireland and England in the twentieth century. *My Life as a Woman and Doctor* is an engaging and personal memoir by pioneering physician and academic Dame Beulah Rosemary Bewley. It is edited by daughter Susan, a highly successful physician and Professor of complex obstetrics at King's College, London. The memoir is a gripping account of Bewley's life as a woman and mother of five children, an immigrant, and a highly successful clinician and academic. Thirteen chapters are organised chronologically by date from 1929 to 1995. The other chapters include an introduction, reflections, and an afterword by husband Thomas Bewley. At the back of the text, readers may also find maps of Ireland and the many London hospitals Bewley worked at, a timeline, her impressive curriculum vitae of several pages, explanatory notes, acknowledgements and an index. The inclusion of these extras, particularly the timeline and the curriculum vitae are particularly helpful in keeping track of Bewley's numerous moves, activities and achievements. There are several pages of coloured and black and white plates throughout the book.

Dame Bewley, born in Derry in Northern Ireland in 1929, recalls that very few women from Northern Ireland received an education in the 1950s, particularly a science education. The lack of a science education was a serious impediment for girls wanting to study medicine. As Bewley recalls, '... few girls were taught physics in those days so hardly any could get into medical school' (p. 186). Women of the upper classes were expected to teach for a few years and then get married and have children. Bewley refused to be a 'second-class' person because she was born a girl. Her husband Thomas Bewley writes that Beulah remained a critic of the misogyny prevalent in Northern Ireland throughout her life. She particularly took issue with assumptions by men that women could not do science and that women should be at home raising children rather than pursuing their careers.

The daughter of a bank manager, Bewley acknowledges the advantages she had that a working-class girl from Northern Ireland would not have. One of these was a good

education at several schools, including fee-paying convent schools in Kilkenny and Dublin, connections and supportive parents. She spent six years at Trinity College, Dublin from 1947 to 1953, gaining an MB BCh, which qualified her as a physician.

Bewley's career in medicine spanned several decades. This brief review will summarise its highlights. During the 1950s and 1960s, in addition to giving birth to five children, Bewley worked on a part-time basis in paediatric clinics, occupational health and preventative medicine. Juggling motherhood and medicine, her time was divided between hospital clinical medicine and public health in several London boroughs. Family planning, antenatal development and paediatrics were her specialities.

After fifteen years of part-time work, Bewley recalls that at the age of forty in 1969, she began a two-year training course for a new MSc in epidemiology and social medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. As Bewley had worked extensively in public health, she maintained that this course provided the perfect path way back to a full-time medical career. Bewley's husband Thomas, a psychiatrist, was supportive of his wife's ambitions. He lessened his own work load to share in the childcare and home management responsibilities. Of the twelve students in the course, Bewley was the only woman and she was the first woman to graduate with this degree. She recounts that her tutors and fellow students were very supportive. During the second year of her course, she studied primary school children's smoking habits which began her life-long research on this subject. In 1974, she was awarded an MD from Trinity College, Dublin for which she had written a study of smoking and respiratory illnesses in primary school children in Derbyshire. Bewley provides interesting details on the nature of medical research at this time, including the mechanics of dealing with children who did not know what phlegm was, and how she and her husband managed childcare.

Over the next two decades, until her retirement in 1995, Bewley practised and taught at many London teaching hospitals including St. Thomas' and King's College. She served on numerous boards and committees, and published many scholarly papers primarily on children and cigarette smoking and related illnesses, and smoking's impact on their academic performance. Other topics she explored were issues confronting women in medicine, smoking and pregnancy, community health, and related topics. The curriculum vitae provided by the editor Susan Bewley is useful for readers who would like to investigate Bewley's many scholarly contributions to medicine and gender issues.

In recognition of her many achievements in the field of women's health and for advancing equal opportunities for women in medicine, particularly while on the Medical Women's Federation on the General Medical Council. Bewley was made a Dame of the British Empire (DBE) in 2000. On receiving the award, she commented: 'There certainly was discrimination. They used to look at you and say she is married, or she has got children and if you were not married, they were expecting you to get married.' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/583896.stm>

Merrilyn Murnane and Beulah Bewley succeeded in their goal of inspiring the next generation of women physicians. Both physicians recognise the debt they owe to their exceptional predecessors. Both women are self-effacing about their own successes and life achievements. The challenges and successes of the courageous pioneering women physicians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are aptly told in both works which complement each other well.

Leigh Whaley

Acadia University, Nova Scotia, Canada