

## Book Reviews

overseas teaching and examining described in the final pages of the history. For example, more than 10 per cent of the doctors who practised in New Zealand before 1930 possessed Glasgow qualifications. Of these 357 individuals, 71 were Glasgow College single licentiates and a further 83 held the conjoint “triple qualification” granted by the three Scottish medical colleges. No hint of this level of outreach appears in this College history.

Where fellows, or prospective fellows, are referred to by name there is often little to indicate how their connection came about. This is well illustrated in the paragraph on the admission of women to the fellowship. We are told nothing about the background of the first applicant, Elizabeth Baker, who applied in 1897. The same is true of the first successful candidate, “one Yamani Sen, a Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery of the University of Calcutta”, who became a fellow in 1912. How she came to be accepted when a number of local women had been rejected in 1905 is never explained.

This apparent lack of curiosity about the individuals connected with the College is compounded by the failure to acknowledge the efforts of a number of those who have helped shed light over the years on the College history. In volume 1 there is no reference to the manuscript history compiled by William Weir in the late nineteenth century although this was drawn upon by Stanley Alstead and others and was presumably available to the authors. By the same token there is only a cursory acknowledgement of the work done by senior fellows in the 1970s and 1980s to research specific aspects of the College history. A good example of this is the footnote (p. xxv) relating to the work on the College property by Jim Hutchison (a man never to my knowledge addressed as “Holmes Hutchison”, as he is elsewhere recorded in the book). Most tellingly, there is no tribute to the videotaped interviews

conducted by Dr Peter McKenzie, a latter-day “Old Mortality”, to capture the memories of his predecessors and contemporaries. The bald note in the bibliography relating to the transcripts of these tapes (p. 257) gives no indication of the extent of this labour of love, or of the value of their contents.

A fleeting reference to the launch in 1971 of the *College Bulletin* concludes that, after spending 120 years “ensuring its fair representation in national developments in medical education”, it was “perhaps fitting that it now turned back to reassure its members and Fellows that it had not forgotten that they were, fundamentally, the College itself”. It is unfortunate that the authors of this history did not heed their own words. Those whose contributions, singly and collectively, helped the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow to evolve into its present form are ill-served by this history.

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**Udo Benzenhöfer, *Der gute Tod? Euthanasie und Sterbehilfe in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Munich, C H Beck, 1999, pp. 272, DM 24.00 (paperback 3-406-42128-8).**

The recent debates on the moral and legal permissibility of active and passive euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide, have led to a number of studies into the concept of the “good death” in certain historical periods and countries. Moreover, there is a growing body of scholarly work on the medical killing of handicapped or mentally ill patients in Nazi Germany. Until now, however, a comprehensive historical survey of the subject was lacking. Benzenhöfer’s account of the changing meanings, evaluations, and practices of euthanasia from Greek antiquity right up to

the most recent cases and legal developments in Germany, Britain, USA, Australia, and the Netherlands helps to fill this gap. Taking the approach of a critical commentator on historical sources, the author presents a wide range of positions in the Jewish and Christian traditions, the medical profession, law, and philosophy (including the contributions by Friedrich Nietzsche and Peter Singer). In particular, he examines the influence of Social Darwinist, eugenic, and utilitarian thought on German discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which prepared—via Karl Binding's and Alfred Hoche's notorious *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (1920)—the ideological ground for the Nazi "euthanasia" programmes. Benzenhöfer's account of these killing programmes includes some new details on the initial case of active euthanasia performed in 1939 on the handicapped "child Knauer".

While medical historians will be familiar with several of the key texts discussed in this book, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Adolf Jost's *Das Recht auf den Tod* (1895), the summaries of relevant court decisions and medical guidelines in Germany during the late 1970s to 1990s (partly reprinted in an appendix) are particularly useful. Benzenhöfer's analysis of these recent developments points to the growing importance of patient directives on limitations of therapy in terminal illness ("patients' wills") and the dangers of proxy consent to withdrawal of treatment in cases of persistent vegetative state. It also illustrates an emerging medical and legal consensus on passive euthanasia, whereas active euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide remain highly controversial and illegal. As for the Netherlands, where active euthanasia is not prosecuted if certain procedural safeguards have been observed, the problem of a "euthanasia mentality", which may undermine truly voluntary decision-making and hamper the progress of palliative care, is highlighted. The author

abstains from drawing broader historical conclusions or from developing a general ethical position on the subject. Nevertheless, this volume will serve well for teaching purposes and for anyone who seeks concise information on the historical dimensions of euthanasia.

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**Bronwyn Rebekah McFarland-Icke**, *Nurses in Nazi Germany: moral choice in history*, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. xvii, 343, £21.95 (hardback 0-691-00665-2).

The promise of this book's title is unfulfilled. It is not an account of the nursing profession in Nazi Germany, nor does it tell us much about moral choice in history. A revised doctoral dissertation, it purports to explain how psychiatric nurses, subject to "an ethical imperative to heal and promote life" dealt with the "moral contradiction" of taking part in "racially motivated compulsory sterilization and 'euthanasia' policies" (p. 1). But we learn very little about these nurses—who they were, where they came from, their families, their education, their ages, their religious views, their interactions with one another. Nowhere is there a description of their training, its length, the institutions they attended, the requirements, the admission standards, the practicum, any special courses in mental illness. Many apparently were male but the reader gets no sense of how many and what difference gender made. Were they really "professionals" at all? At times their role seems no different from that of attendants or guards. A kitchen worker at one institution, for example, apparently unremarkable, simply applies to become a nurse. While we are told that many had "less than the desired amount of education", we do not learn what the "desired amount" actually was.