

## Book Reviews

GORDON McLACHLAN (editor), *Improving the common weal: aspects of Scottish health services 1900–1984*. A collation in honour of the late Sir John Brotherston. Edinburgh University Press, 1987, 8vo, pp. xviii, 635, £35.00.

The late Sir John Brotherston played a leading role in the development of the Scottish health services for many years, both as Chief Medical Officer at the Scottish Home and Health Department, and Professor of Public Health and Social Medicine in Edinburgh. In his retirement he planned a history of Scottish health care in the twentieth century: many of his chosen contributors had, like himself, influenced the events which they described. In collaboration with John Brims, Brotherston prepared three introductory chapters as an outline history of the services: these 150 pages are virtually a short book in their own right. In other sections, the contributors deal with individual topics: the branches of the NHS, special services, and other significant factors such as medical technology and health economics. When the work was well advanced, Brotherston's death made this his memorial volume.

Such circumstances are apt to mute the critical response. It seems churlish to offer anything but praise to a work so lovingly laboured, even though the title apparently hints at the bland self-congratulation which is not uncommon in surveys of twentieth-century medicine. Fortunately, there is no need to abandon critical standards: this book is an invaluable guide to modern Scottish medical history, and will be a major source of reference to many. In particular, Brotherston and Brims's introductory chapters provide a much-needed general history of the Scottish health services, clearly written, and with a wide range of references. The account of administrative changes is enlivened by reference to the contemporary debates they provoked in the press. Most of the succeeding chapters have the same tone of authoritative history written from personal knowledge. This will be the first point of reference for anyone seeking a guide to the history of hospitals, general practice, public health, and the major branches of the health services in modern Scotland. The title, too, is more ambiguous than it appears. Drawn from Sir David Lyndsay's poem 'The Complaint of the Common Weill of Scotland', it by no means implies complete satisfaction with the existing order.

Some criticism must be made: a few of the shorter chapters are perfunctory, and an editorial or publishing decision seems to have precluded the use of graphs, even though several contributors are describing statistical patterns which would have benefited from graphic presentation. The references, although full and scholarly, come mainly from official reports, and the result, in spite of Brotherston's example and Gordon McLachlan's prefatory strictures, often gives the impression that history is made by committees: controversy, even in such contentious matters as the treatment of mental patients, has a limited place in this book.

The book's great strength, however, arises from its central concerns, which are also the great strength of Scottish medicine. Sir John Brotherston's ideal was an integrated health service, a goal encouraged by the tight-knit nature of the Scottish medical profession, bound by ties of education and culture not only to one other, but to the legal profession and the administrators at St Andrew's House. Brotherston was not hopeful that the Scottish traditions would survive stronger control from London, and wished to explore both their strengths and weaknesses. There is one Scottish medical tradition of which this book is itself an example: the ability to see the public health service as a noble cause worthy of the greatest talents.

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KENNETH COLLINS, *Go and learn: the international story of Jews and Medicine in Scotland*, Aberdeen University Press, 1988, 8vo, pp. xxi, 193, £14.95.

From ancient times, medicine has been a profession favoured by Jews. The philosophy and practice of Jewish medicine were personified by the great medieval rabbi-physician Maimonides. In the ensuing centuries, the aspiration of the Jew to train and qualify as a physician was thwarted by the religious intolerance of European universities which, with few exceptions (e.g., Montpellier and Leiden) refused Jews. English universities at Oxford and Cambridge placed