

Book Reviews

The volume takes up Roger Cooter's suggestion that the history of the Red Cross in different national contexts would give a picture of "the role of complex political negotiations between conflicting military, medical, and philanthropic interests", largely concentrating on the first two factors. Early chapters describe the international Red Cross, the setting up of the Dutch organization in 1867, and its activities within the Netherlands during the First World War as it negotiated a place alongside existing voluntary organizations and the military health service. Later chapters analyse the position of the Dutch Red Cross in the inter-war period and connections with the peace movement. There is a very brief English summary.

The Netherlands offers an unusual case study, the Red Cross being established in a country which was not a strong military power, and whose population was not interested in military issues, but which, according to van Bergen, had an exceedingly belligerent army. The country was free from war, mobilizing, but not fighting in the First World War, and experiencing only brief skirmishes in 1940, when Hitler's troops invaded and took control in a matter of days. Contrasts in the organization of Red Cross medical services with those of countries heavily engaged in war were clearly beyond the scope of this study. But more could have been said about Red Cross history not just as "military history" and to a lesser extent "medical history", but as the history of a modernizing society, reflecting changing notions of philanthropy and ideas on war as an aspect of a broader social process. The volume focuses primarily on the relationship between the Red Cross and army and not between the Red Cross and civilian society. Nor is the relationship between war and its potentially stimulating effect on civilian medical provision explored in a broader context. These, however, are reservations on what is an important and suggestive study, in a developing area of interest amongst medical historians.

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Anne Killalea, *The great scourge: the Tasmanian infantile paralysis epidemic, 1937–1938*, Hobart, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1995, pp. x, 165, illus., A\$20.00 (0–909479–15–1).

Anne Killalea's detailed study of a major polio epidemic in Australia's island state is based on newspaper accounts and also on the memories of health professionals, patients and family members, and the general public. Her work is not historiographically engaged, but is a history written for a local audience, and her readers are assumed to have a knowledge of Australian society and politics in the 1930s. Killalea outlines an interesting and familiar story: Tasmanians' suspicion of "mainlanders", the imposition of quarantine, the continuing use of house fumigation, the fear of those working with the infected (a teacher from an "infected" school forced to take a phenol bath at the local police station), disabled children taunted at school. The epidemic raised important ethical issues that are briefly touched on: the constant shortages of iron-lung machines, for example, meant that health professionals, especially nurses, had to decide which patients would use them and which would not.

The book has some wonderful illustrations, many of them photographs from private collections, but their usefulness is limited by the author's too terse descriptions, and the lack of analysis in the text. The author does not compare "official" medical interpretations of the disease to lay popular ones, but does discuss the major role of nurse Elizabeth Kenny's alternative polio treatment. There is little analysis of the social and economic make-up of the state and its regions, and therefore the study lacks a convincing epidemiological explanation for why the epidemic appeared when it did or spread the way it did.

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