

## Reviews

*Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth-century Government.* Edited by Gillian Sutherland. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972. viii, 295 pp. U.K. price: £3.75.

THE NINETEENTH seems lately to have replaced the sixteenth as the century in which historians are inclined to see a 'revolution in government'. This book gives evidence of the large amount of research which is currently going on with regard to the growth of governmental activity in a century which has so often been seen as dominated by devotion to the principles of *laissez-faire*. It is a collection of papers on the subject, all but one of which were presented at a *colloquium* held in the summer of 1969 under the auspices of *Past and Present*. The editor tells us that, after the papers had been circulated, sixty people spent a full day discussing them. Notes on the discussion were to have been given in *Past and Present*, but that idea was abandoned in favour of the publication of this book. This is in some ways unfortunate, for, apart from a few tantalizing references in the editor's introduction, no report on the debate is presented.

There is in fact an interesting conflict between the title of the book which refers to 'the growth of government' and the actual subject of the *colloquium* which was 'the development of the machinery of government'. The authors do not uniformly stress growth and expansion. One or two of the essays indeed concentrate on the phenomena of 'resistance' and 'control'. And we do not get here the attention to increase in governmental activity in the spheres of economic and social policy which was characteristic of the early stages of the debate on the 'revolution in government'. The vision seems to have narrowed down and become more bureaucratic. In part, this is because historians are now passing beyond the stage of the broad generalizations and 'models' of growth which were so necessary for stimulating thought and interest. Now they are immersing themselves in the records and, as these are in large part and inescapably the records of government departments, their work acquires a bureaucratic form. And so most of these essays concern the history of particular government departments. In due course, no doubt, someone will rise to the surface again and advance new general conclusions. But in the meantime it seems that the emphasis is going to be on accumulating detailed information on the working of every individual department. This will be all the more the case because such studies as have so far been done, including those in this book, bring out the great diversity of recruitment of staff and conduct of business in the various departments.

Another theme which is emerging is the contrast between the periods before and after 1870. There was a marked tendency in the late nineteenth century towards ossification in departmental procedures. The scope for recruitment from outside the regular civil service diminished, and there were fewer chances for 'statesmen in disguise' such as had been able to shape the development of governmental activity in the earlier nineteenth century when rules were much more elastic and unformed.

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*British Strategy in the Far East 1919-1939.* By William Roger Louis. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971. 284 pp. N.Z. price: \$5.40.

TWO FEATURES stand out about this book. First, it gives a fascinating, and appetizing indication of the richness of the British public records which were recently opened under the 30-year rule. Concentrating on the Foreign Office, Cabinet, and, to a certain extent, Committee of Imperial Defence records, Louis is the first author to have surveyed the entire inter-war period in this way. Secondly, it manages to discuss 'strategy' with a deliberate neglect of its military aspects. Thus Louis offers a work which, he admits, is 'impressionistic and thematically selective'. He attempts 'something rather more than a study of British policy', something considerably less than a study of military appreciations, capabilities, theories or preparedness. What he has done may be described as outlining the Foreign Office's assessments of events in China and Japan; its conception of British interest and objectives, and its broad diplomatic 'strategies' for achieving them.

To cover so broad a canvas from such a wealth of documents is no mean achievement and, in so far as a dominant theme comes through, it is the role of personalities in a set of situations where they knew they were powerless. Most frequently quoted are Sir Victor Wellesley (deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1925-36) and Sir John Pratt (who served in the consular service in China, 1898-1924, and was adviser on Far East affairs, 1925-38). In the long run, British diplomatists in the Far East, concludes Louis, 'felt themselves buffeted by Asian forces beyond their control'.

One might, indeed, be tempted to see the British policy-makers as 'latter-day Victorians' doing their best to retain their composure in a world rapidly passing them by. Thus over the question of the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1921, Lloyd George insisted: 'the British Empire must behave like a gentleman', and when, at the end of the Washington Conference the termination of the alliance was announced, Lord Balfour's head was seen to drop forward: 'It was an amazing revelation', wrote a journalist, 'of what the Japanese Treaty has meant to the men of a vanished age. It was the spinal cord that had been severed'. Again, in the uncertainties of