

*Health and Healing in Tropical Australia and Papua New Guinea*. Edited by Roy MacLeod and Donald Denoon. James Cook University, Townsville, 1991. 213 pp. Australian price: \$25.00.

COLLECTIONS of conference papers are often disappointing, with only a few worthwhile pieces scattered among the dross of superficial or second-rate items, some of which read as if they had been written on the plane the night before the conference. Happily, this common pattern is reversed in *Health and Healing*. Apart from one curiously brief piece on the Fantome Island leprosum, most of these papers are based on archival research and have interesting things to say. The writing is rather uneven in places, but the editors provide an excellent introduction, bibliography and index. Footnoting is light but adequate, reflecting the origins of these papers in the first Australasian conference devoted to the history of medicine in the tropics, held at Townsville in August 1987 as part of an ANZAAS Congress.

The contributors are all historians rather than doctors, and half are staff or graduates of the James Cook University at Townsville, so the collection has a distinctively regional, even local, flavour and is refreshingly free of the narrowly iatrogenic 'history of medicine' approach. Part I addresses key issues and individuals in the administration of tropical medicine in Australia. Donald Denoon's paper covers ground rather similar to parts of his chapter in *Disease, Medicine and Empire* (1988) and argues that the Schools of Tropical Medicine in London and elsewhere in the late nineteenth century tended to produce administrators who saw tropical diseases as specific to tropical peoples, ignoring the circumstances in which they lived. Taboos of race and gender blinded otherwise very able men to the practical possibilities of a 'health revolution' among native populations simply by improving water supplies and sanitation. Instead, tropical medicine was fixated on exotic conditions, and was disease-based rather than health-based. Quarantine and segregation were the favoured approaches to disease, until the appearance of effective vaccines against diseases such as yaws. In Townsville, tropical medicine became more explicitly racist in its focus than in London. A.T. Yarwood's substantial chapter on Sir Raphael Cilento (not one of the conference papers) reveals all too clearly the racist and elitist assumptions of this key health administrator, and the effect on public health policies of tensions between personal ambition and institutional constraints. R. McGregor examines Baldwin Spencer's 1913 report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory, and finds that it offered positive and far-sighted plans for their education and health, despite its acceptance of the 'doomed race' concept. There are interesting comparisons to be made here with attitudes to the Maori in the 1890s. Lorraine Harloe traces Anton Breinl's sadly frustrated career at the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine up to 1921, with useful asides on the 'White Australia' concept, while James Griffin examines the remarkable success of John Gunther in post-war Papua New Guinea. (Prince Philip thought he must be a Catholic, after hearing Gunther enthuse about the need to improve and increase the Melanesian population!) James Gillespie offers a critical assessment of the Rockefeller Foundation's £100,000 campaign against hookworm, which was distorted by political considerations from the start. The 1919 influenza epidemic (not 1918, for Australia, as he has it on p.77) had laid bare the incompetence and parochialism of state health agencies and contributed to the establishment of the Commonwealth Health Department, but state governments continued to resist or sabotage federal health initiatives, as demonstrated by the hookworm campaign.

Part II of this collection comprises a group of case-studies of health problems in northern Australia. Clive Moore makes good use of court records to examine alcohol

abuse among Melanesian sugar-cane workers in Queensland's Mackay district, describing a violent and unpredictable frontier society of the late nineteenth century, in which the supply of alcohol was big business. Again, there are obvious New Zealand parallels to examine here. Dawn May finds that the health of Aborigines on the cattle stations of north Queensland was generally far better than that of their kin on reservations or urban-fringe settlements, largely because they had access to traditional foods and herbal remedies. Interventions by government agencies and well-intentioned doctors sometimes had dire consequences. Lyn Riddett's paper on the role of women as healers and preservers of health in the 1930s suggests another explanation, that of matriarchal supervision of native workers' health. Though usually depicted as a tough man's world, European settlement in the tropical north owed much to the skills of a scattering of educated white women. Peter Bell describes appalling health conditions among alluvial miners in tropical Queensland, in contrast to the Chinese miners who managed their diet and disease problems successfully, while Janice Wagner considers 'Nightcarts and Nuisances' in two contrasting shires of north Queensland, showing that the 'miasma' concept of infectious disease, though mistaken, at least helped promote practical and effective sanitation measures in some areas, making them less noisome than most.

Altogether this is an interesting and soundly-researched collection of papers, which cross the traditional disciplinary boundaries of medical and political history to address themes of race, class and gender in the mainstream of modern social-medical history. The case-studies are particularly interesting for their attempts to explain why different communities have responded so variously to similar physical environments and health problems over time.

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*Markets, Money and Empire. The Political Economy of the Australian Wool Industry.* By K. Tsokhas. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990. viii, 235 pp. Australian price: \$29.95.

THIS CAREFUL and informed study of the political economy of the Australian wool industry between 1914 and the 1940s is intended primarily as a contribution to imperial history. Its sustained thesis is that significant Australian autonomy and limited British influence enabled the former to pursue policies which were motivated by economic nationalism rather than loyalty to the Empire. Tsokhas examines Anglo-Australian policies with respect to the wool industry and concludes that Australia came out very well in areas of disagreement between the two countries. In particular, in both wars Britain agreed to act as a monopsonist for Australian wool output at a generous price.

The main problem with Tsokhas's interesting thesis is that his case study of the wool industry may not be an entirely representative one. There were plenty of reasons why Australia was likely to get the better of the deal: wool was much more important to Australian than British interests and therefore negotiating representation was at a higher level for the former; Australia's domination of world output put it in a strong bargaining position; and British knowledge of prevailing economic conditions in the wool industry