

us a long way in understanding how the problem of mothers and babies came to be conceptualised, the reader is still left wondering how the demarcation of the field occurred. What was the interrelationship between the data on infant mortality collected by the state and the development of professional expertise that attempted to remedy the problem? How was it that mothers and babies came to be the focus of nation building? How did the eugenic undertow to efforts to reduce infant mortality interact with programs to improve the mothering skills of working-class women?

A final difficulty with the work is that the mothers and their babies do not live in the book. Despite the case study and the oral histories, there is little reality about these women and their babies—dead or living. This is a disappointment as the topic lends itself to a far more vivid and immediate style of presentation.

But these misgivings are minor and should not detract from what is essentially a herculean effort of rigorous scholarship. Mein Smith has provided an invaluable text on the social history of infant mortality in Australia—one which I am sure is already forming the basis of further research that will continue the investigation of gender and nation building in this country.

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Not Just Weighing Babies, Plunket in Auckland, 1980-1998, Linda Bryder, (Pyramid Press, Auckland, 1998), 119.

This brief but detailed history of the Auckland branch of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, provides a local example of the larger enterprise described by Phillipa Mein Smith, in which the imperatives of nation building are conflated with the motherhood and the survival of infants. The history was commissioned by the Society and the principal sources are the records and archives it has preserved. As the author acknowledges, it is very much a local history, tracing the day-to-day work of the Society over a period of ninety years during which it has put into practice its motto, 'To help the Mothers and save the Babies'. It began in 1908 as a branch of the New Zealand-wide

association founded by Frederic Truby King (later Sir Frederic), the Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children. Early in its history it acquired the informal title of Plunket and this was formalised in 1980 when it became the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society.

The Society began its work through an active voluntary committee which took responsibility for policy and fundraising. This has continued, with the number of committees expanding as the population of Auckland has grown and sub-branches have developed. It has relied largely on donations from the public, supplemented by government subsidies. Its principal mode of operation has been to employ trained nurses and to provide them with a local base, easily accessible to mothers, where women can visit for advice and assistance in the care of their babies. These nurses make the first contact with mothers, but after this, it is up to the mother to maintain the contact she wishes.

The focus in the beginning was on encouraging and assisting mothers to breastfeed, and where this wasn't possible, to provide a suitable replacement. As the decades have passed, the Society has extended its role to include, at different times: a Karitane hospital for the care of premature babies and those who failed to thrive, when the general hospitals in Auckland did not provide any special facilities for this; training nurses specially in the care of babies; and the provision of pre-natal preparation. Changing community ideas are reflected in the gradual shift in emphasis on 'motherhood' to 'parenthood'.

The story is an internal account of the society and in this respect the author has competently fulfilled her commission. At the same time, however, she has succeeded in conveying the interactive quality of the association between mothers and nurses. The response to the problem of sick and malnourished children in New Zealand was similar to that in Britain and Australia. Attention was directed towards the actions of the mother rather than the social conditions in which she cared for her children. There is no doubt either that the Plunket movement was informed by Truby King's desire to train women to care for their babies in a regimented fashion which in some cases did affront the ethos of culture and class. However Bryder has succeeded in conveying the point that the work of the society was successful only in so far as it struck a genuine response in mothers and was prepared to incorporate this in its activities. The development of expertise in this instance was rather more than a 'disciplinary venture', and the

story of the Plunket nurses does raise interesting questions about such interpretations.

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Tropical Medicine in the Twentieth Century: A History of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, 1898-1990, Helen J. Power, (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1999), xiii, 284.

Although 'biology' was coined in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the term 'biologist' was not available until the last few decades of the century, when career paths in the life sciences begin to pass through the laboratory, and 'naturalist' would no longer do as an occupational label. Similarly, we can find doctors expert in the diseases of warm climates, or even in 'tropical diseases', throughout the nineteenth century, but no specialists in 'tropical medicine' until the 1890s. Again, the new term indicates a shift in the late nineteenth century away from unadorned naturalistic description in the life sciences, and in medicine toward laboratory experimentation and more rationalistic explanations of normal and pathological processes. Tropical medicine thus began as laboratory work: no wonder, then, that it could thrive so far from the tropics, in institutes at Liverpool and London, both established in the last few years of the century. One could not do 'tropical medicine' without a laboratory: most doctors in the tropics, therefore, continued to practise general medicine in a warm climate until laboratory services arrived a few decades later.

In this fascinating (if hideously expensive) book, Helen Power, a lecturer in the history of medicine at Liverpool University, describes the origins of tropical medicine in imperial Britain and the different institutional forms it took in London and along the once bustling Mersey. She thus swells the crowded ranks of British historians of tropical medicine, which include David Arnold, W.F. Bynum, Mark Harrison, Molly Sutphen, Michael Worboys, and Lisa Wilkinson (the author of a companion centenary history of the London School). Many of these historians are associated with the Wellcome Trust, which in the past was one of the beneficiaries of the colonialism they now study.