

Book Reviews

From Shaman to Modern Medicine. A Century of the Healing Arts in British Columbia, by T. F. Rose, M.D., Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1972. \$7.50. *Strong Medicine: History of Healing on the Northwest Coast*, by Robert E. McKechnie II, M.D., Vancouver: J. J. Douglas Ltd., 1972. \$8.95.

The historical development of medical practice is an important part of the social history of British Columbia, as of any community, since everyone in that history — from the autochthonous Indian to the citizen of the welfare state — has been vitally concerned with his health and with his social and institutional relationships with the guardian of that health — the shaman-priest-surgeon-physician-general practitioner-specialist-medical entrepreneur. The historical continuity of these relationships, which the authors of both the books under review note, provides a convenient framework for such a history. But, as with the history of any general topic placed in a local context, there are fundamental problems of narrative structure. The historian will tend to emphasize, either the general background of the topic — in which case his account will appear disjointed and irrelevant to the local scene —; or the parish-pump details of which most of his source consist, — in which case his narrative will seem disjointed and unduly chatty and parochial. Unfortunately both books suffer from this hazard in varying degrees; both lose sight of the central theme which they have identified and range well beyond the permissible limits of irrelevance; but both, also, in various ways, provide interesting and useful insights into the relationships between medical practice and the communities of British Columbia.

Here the similarities end, for the approaches of the two doctor-historians differ widely. For Dr. Rose, the really significant fact is that in British Columbia “modern medicine began with the third decade of this century.” His narrative strongly justifies the present (while warning about future dangers to be expected from present trends, such as too-free

prescription of "wonder drugs" and too much cossetting of hypochondriacs), and is uneven in the treatment of the past.

Dr. Rose is at his best as an iconoclast. He gives a clear, informative interpretation of pioneer medical practice as crude but adequate to the demands of a rough age, and explains the technical details of Dr. Helmcken's practice — both preferable to the customary hagiography. Similarly Dr. Rose records a salutary reminder that the first scientific innovations in medicine gave surgeons the means of undertaking all sorts of dangerous and unnecessary operations, physicians the incentive to prescribe dangerous drugs, and amateur anaesthetists the means and the opportunity to help the surgeons kill off exiguous patients. Concerning his other great interest — the relations of the profession with the public and especially government — Dr. Rose is informative and vigorously advocative on the organization of the profession (to regulate the profession and promote public health, not merely to resist medicare), public health, the Workmen's Compensation Board, hospital insurance and pre-paid medicine. He is especially incisive in his analysis of the economic relationships between doctors and their patients, from contract doctoring in company towns to free enterprise fee-levying to hospital insurance and pre-paid medicine, removing the veil of mystery which customarily has surrounded this important question. On such topics as nursing, hospitals, paramilitary medicine, the history of tuberculosis, cancer and mental health and medical education, on the other hand, Dr. Rose either contents himself with a synoptic catalogue of developments, or is wildly confused and anecdotal. The book is vividly written (e.g. his description of anaesthesia in the pioneering age: "When the surgeon was ready to operate, it seems that the fellow leaning against the wall with apparently nothing on his mind was given the chloroform bottle and invited to pour") and has a force and breadth of interest that largely make up for its disjointed presentation.

Dr. McKechnie's book is a less ambitious, less informative and less useful work, but a much tidier and, within its limits, possibly a more reliable one. Where Dr. Rose firmly commits himself to the present, Dr. McKechnie expresses his enthusiasm for the remote past, in an account of shamanistic medicine among the Indians, and for the heroic period of pioneering medicine, which he sees as extending in diminishing scale from the giant labours of Dr. Helmcken to the 1920's. The best parts of the book are the first section on Indian medicine, which is well constructed, well written and extremely informative, and part of the chap-

ter on medicine in the 1920's, in which Dr. McKechnie gives a fascinating description of "improved" surgery in that era.

Unfortunately Dr. McKechnie is much less effective on other topics. He devotes a section to pioneering medicine in British Columbia, entitled "The 19th Century: Science Takes Hold," in which he gives enlightening accounts of the limited skills of early practitioners, their pragmatism, and the methods current in medicine and surgery toward the end of the nineteenth century. But these are interspersed with accounts of the non-medical activities of Drs. J. F. Kennedy and W. F. Tolmie, and of three journals of practice from naval ships (both largely irrelevant to the main theme), and a muddled account of Dr. Helmcken's relationship with his patients in which we never do discover what the basis of that relationship was. Nor, indeed, are we told how science "took hold." Perhaps it didn't until much later. Certainly this reviewer remembers as a boy in the up-country of British Columbia, being treated by a well-known G. P. of the day who, when he was unsure of a diagnosis, would place his hand on the child's head and solemnly state: "It must be acid in his system." The diagnosis comes from Galen (129-199 A.D.) and has no known scientific basis.

Nor is Dr. McKechnie much happier in his discussion of the twentieth century. He telescopes much of what he has to say on changes in medical techniques and the treatment of patients into three synoptic chapters that are little more than catalogues of events. Here, too, he appears to be especially anxious to interpret the changes in the doctor-patient relationship, though he seems uncertain how to go about it. Thus in Chapter 23, "A Doctor's Life," he is led in successive paragraphs to picture the B.C. doctor (surely the Vancouver doctor) at the beginning of the century as having to attend in formal dress concerts by Melba or Caruso and ballet performances by Pavlova, as giving "little thought to his fees," as being above material calculations, as being rewarded "in other ways," and as enjoying "worldly comforts and even some luxuries." Later he notes that this idyllic, if somewhat confused pattern of life came to an end with the imposition of income tax during the First World War, which forced the doctor to concern himself with money. Even then, we are assured, "by and large physicians were untrained and inexperienced in the ways of making money," though they found out fast that they could make the odd dollar during prohibition by selling prescriptions for liquor. But Dr. McKechnie is much more concerned with the atrophy of the spiritual relationship between the doctor and patient as a result of this growing materialism. He takes heart in the assumption that since

modern scientific medicine has not yet eliminated disease nor made cure a foregone conclusion, there must still be a place for "a powerful faith that can release the self-healing propensities of body and mind."

Finally, it should be noted that whereas Dr. Rose most unfortunately rarely cites his sources and provides no bibliography, Dr. McKechnie provides good, if sometimes discursive, footnotes and his bibliography is extremely useful. Both books would have benefited from some firm editing to eliminate a variety of minor solecisms.

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The Ladners of Ladner: By Covered Wagon to the Welfare State, by Leon J. Ladner. Vancouver, Mitchell Press Limited, 1972. pp. 161. \$6.50.

The careers of two young Cornishmen who travelled by wagon train across the United States to California in the mid-nineteenth century, thence to the Fraser River gold rush, and later to permanent settlement in the Fraser delta and the acquisition of wealth and influence in the new society of British Columbia ought to provide material for a book of absorbing interest and some importance. Regrettably, it must be said that this volume is disappointing and falls far short of being the contribution to the social history of British Columbia that it might have been.

A major problem arises from the apparent paucity of information which the author has about the activities of his father, T. E. Ladner, and his uncle, W. H. Ladner. Although we are told a good deal about wagon trains in the American west, about life in the Cariboo country, about Indian customs and relations between Indians and white settlers in British Columbia, and about the early salmon canning industry, what the author has to say about the role of the Ladners in the developments discussed is often based only on inference or surmise. The result is neither good general history, nor good family history. The occasional interjection of an anecdote about an African tribe, or some episode in the Canadian House of Commons, in which the author sat for nine years as a Conservative member, adds nothing to the flow of the narrative. A further difficulty for the reader arises from the author's failure to adopt even the simplest bibliographical style as a means of ordering his material and indicating his sources. A competent editor would have insisted on the removal of references to the sources from the body of the text.

Mr. Ladner wishes his book to stand as a tribute not only to his own family but to all B.C. pioneers. He also wants it to serve as a sermon in praise of the free enterprising individualist and a warning against the iniquities of the welfare state. From time to time the reader is told that "in those days no benevolent government gave any assistance or even encouragement to immigrants," that "the thought never crossed their minds that government would look after them" and that "one should never forget the inherent acquisitive or self-serving characteristics of mankind, evidenced in every page of history." All this leads one to speculate about Mr. Ladner's position within the Conservative party. His extreme mistrust of any form of state responsibility in economic and social life places him well outside the main stream of Canadian Conservatism. But perhaps he was not so untypical of British Columbia Conservatives? Some answers to that question may be forthcoming, since Mr. Ladner assures us that this book is a prelude to a second volume which will deal more directly with politics and especially with "that creeping political and economic menace, Communism. . . ." It is to be hoped that he will not confine himself to generalizations, but will discuss his own experience in the politics of British Columbia.

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MARGARET PRANG

Comments on Norman Ruff's Review of *The Rush for Spoils*

Dr. Norman Ruff's review of my *The Rush for Spoils* in the Spring 1973 issue of *BC Studies* has a certain air of authority. It is filled with quarrelsome minutiae, flecked with page references and quotations, embellished with occasional minor witticisms and weighed throughout with censorious pronouncements reminiscent of scholarship. All of this is contained within an eight page treatment of a book whose publication the reviewer considers to be "potentially an event of some significance."

Now Dr. Ruff's review might itself qualify as an occurrence of some importance were it a responsible and informed assessment of *The Rush for Spoils*. Unfortunately it is exactly the opposite. What passes for a careful evaluation is a haphazard search for nits. What appears to be a full and thorough treatment of *The Rush for Spoils* is in substance a sad mélange of error and distortion.

For someone who loudly protests about meticulous documentation and in large part confuses minor editing with reviewing, Dr. Ruff proves remarkably lax and sloppy in his own work. In his first footnote (page 69), he twice refers to the middle name of Hubert Bancroft as Howie when in fact it should read Howe. In the same note he misspells the title of Albert Métin's classic work *La Colombie Britannique* which comes out in Dr. Ruff's work as *La Columbia Britannique*. On the next page (70), there is a mistaken reference to the name of British Columbia's first Liberal premier, known to his contemporaries as Harlan Brewster, but who Dr. Ruff wrongly identifies as Harold Brewster. General A. D. McRae is twice incorrectly referred to on page 72 as A. D. MacRae, although to give Dr. Ruff his due, he does finally get the General's name right in a footnote.

These are all, of course, minor inaccuracies which, like the few Dr. Ruff discovers in my 318 page volume, would scarcely be worth noting. What does require comment and correction, however, is the spate of inaccuracies and distortions contained in sections of the review where Dr. Ruff pursues his curious path of denigration. In some instances, Dr. Ruff stumbles at the very moment he gloats over the discovery of a nit. In other instances, he brazenly distorts what I write, misreads words, sentences and passages, and imputes errors and omissions where none exist. The net result is an ineffectual self-parody.

A transparent device of Dr. Ruff is to cite omissions where they do not exist. "Another notable omission," he writes on page 72, "is any reference to Bowser's death during the 1933 election campaign." Had he

checked page 307, footnote 164, he would have noticed that I cite Bowser's death — "W. J. Bowser died of heart failure during the campaign." On page 72, Dr. Ruff misreads my sketch of Colonel James Baker, then proceeds to censure me for failing to mention that Baker had been elected on three occasions before the election of 1898. Within the context of my brief exposition, this "omission" is no omission at all except to Dr. Ruff who seems to have his own unfathomable reasons for wanting to cram some extra material into my book. But this is hardly all. Dr. Ruff advances from error to absurdity when he writes that I placed Baker "in the fictitious riding of Kootenay (West) South." Had Dr. Ruff bothered to check page 68 of my book, he would note my reference is to the real riding of Kootenay West (South) rather than to his own fictional invention imputed to me. Dr. Ruff could have avoided this self-parody by noting from my statement that Baker ran for office *soon after* his arrival in British Columbia, that the election in question was Baker's first, in 1886, in which, whatever its name, there was — unlike 1898 — only one Kootenay riding. I suspect Dr. Ruff would have done best not to have raised the question in the first place.

Dr. Ruff's essay abounds in similar errors and absurdities. On page 72, he accuses me of obscuring General McRae's dealings with "nominees of party machines." This is nonsense. An ordinary reading of my account of McRae's wartime experiences would discern that I discuss partisan corruption in purchasing. On page 74, he writes of my "disregard" of "a prorogation of the Legislative Assembly in 1899." In fact, in the very next paragraph, on page 71, after describing the opening and events of the session of 1899, I wrote "the government was in deep trouble, however, when the session ended." The thirty-two divisions Dr. Ruff writes of on page 74 in reference to the 1900 session of the Legislature should read thirty-one. Dr. Ruff chides me (page 72) for ignoring Smithe's presence in the House on the opening day, January 27, of the session of 1887. While Mr. Smithe may have been there on January 27, the correct date for the opening of the session is January 24. On page 73, Dr. Ruff writes that "both text and footnote refer to the appearance of Rossiter's affidavit in the sixth issue of 'The Searchlight' when it actually appears in the seventh issue." Wrong again. Mr. Finerty's affidavit is actually included in Searchlight number five and is referred to in the sixth issue. On page 72, the reader is treated to perhaps the most ludicrous example of Dr. Ruff's bungling when he writes: "Rather more disconcerting is the information that Captain James

Cook's visit in 1778 was his 'third visit' rather than third voyage" (p. 12). The logic of this statement is baffling.

On pages 74-75, Dr. Ruff includes the following statement which affords him another opportunity to practice confusion. "If his capacity for exaggeration fails him and the land given in support of the Eagle Pass Wagon Road becomes 6,000 rather than 60,000 acres (p. 61), the remainder of Robin's description stays remarkably close to the original." The failing here is Dr. Ruff's inability to read correctly page 61 of my work in which I write of "a grant of 60,000 acres of land in the Yale and Kootenay districts to Gustavus Wright to construct a wagon road . . ." I make it very clear that the 6,000 acre give-away was to the C.P.R. in Coal Harbour and not for the construction for any wagon road — "Finally the government alienated 6,000 valuable acres of land in Coal Harbour at the mouth of Burrard Inlet to encourage the Canadian Pacific Railway to do what it would have done anyway . . ."

Elsewhere, Dr. Ruff continues to pile error on distortion. He spends an entire paragraph (page 73) trying to prove I am guilty of "hyperbole" but succeeds merely in confounding the figures. I grant that the "over 15,000" relief camp workers cited on page 236 might properly have read 14,912, but seriously wonder why Dr. Ruff bothers the reader with such trivia. On page 73, he asserts there were 73,628 registrations to April 30, 1932 but the number actually mentioned in the Annual Report of the Department of Labour for 1932 is 72,548. After flourishing a bagful of figures to prove my hyperbolic sins he comes to the considered conclusion, gleaned from government sources, that the "total number actually receiving relief for May 1932 was 64,262" a figure which badly obscures the extent of the problem. On page E 12 of the Department of Labour's report for 1931, a figure of 106,550 is cited for persons who received direct relief up to April 30, 1932.

Dr. Ruff's catalogue of misrepresentations does not end here. On page 73, he asserts that material cited in my treatment of the post-McBride period under the "Oliver Papers" are to be found in the Public Archives of British Columbia in the files of the Pattullo Papers. In fact, most of the Oliver letters used in *The Rush for Spoils* were researched five years ago when they were kept in storage uncatalogued, in cardboard boxes, separate from the body of Pattullo's letters and papers. I never did receive a clear answer from archivists whether these letters were the *Oliver Papers* or the *Pattullo Papers*. Since John Oliver was premier of British Columbia for ten years, and a good part of the letters were his own, written while premier, I thought it sensible to refer to them as the *Oliver*

Papers. I don't know what their present archival status is, but it does seem odd to lump a decade of the letters of one premier, written while in office, into the papers of a subsequent premier. I trust, for example, that the main body of Laurier's letters are not to be found in the Public Archives of Canada in the papers of Borden, or that the bulk of Woodrow Wilson's presidential letters are not lost among Warren Harding's Papers.

Dr. Ruff's remarkable facility for distortion is given free reign in his snide treatment of my account of McBride's political success. On pages 72-73 is found the following statement — "The most amusing sequence is the account of McBride's political success in which we are told that in 1907 his 'personal popularity had peaked' (p. 99), that in 1909, he reached 'the pinnacle of his career' (p. 115) and still later that, he was 'at the high point of public esteem' " (p. 129). Anyone who bothers to check these statements will quickly realize that Ruff has torn them from their context to satisfy his own need for derision. The first statement, that "McBride's personal popularity had peaked," was an obvious reference to his conclusion of the tough first four years of his premiership preceding the difficult 1907 election. The second statement refers to the unprecedented esteem he enjoyed after being returned by large and increasing majorities in the 1907 and 1909 elections. The third statement, on page 129, contains no immediate temporal reference whatsoever, is retrospective and obviously applies to the time earlier alluded to, in and around 1909. Not satisfied with this gross distortion, Dr. Ruff ends the paragraph by accusing me of perpetrating a "painful . . . absurdity" when I wrote on page 209 that "the sole Interior Provincial candidate returned was D. H. Stoddart elected for Chilliwack" (page 73). What was meant by the word "Interior," written within the context of an argument that the provincial party was primarily an urban party, was simply "outside of the island and Vancouver city." While "Interior" may not have been the most felicitous word, its use was obvious and scarcely merited Dr. Ruff's loud declamation.

This latter section, I would suggest, clearly illustrates Dr. Ruff's shoddy, but transparent, technique of denigration. He prefaces his remarks with scornful assertions like "the number of inaccuracies, misrepresentations and omissions grows into a tedious list," "The most painful but unfortunately not the final absurdity," "Any patience with an author and sympathy for the enormity of his task begin to decline," "facts begin to blur into fiction," then presents limited false evidence, veneered with quotations, page references and an occasional footnote, in

support of his damaging assertions. All the while, of course, serious questions of interpretation, perspective, balance, insight, organization, and narrative flow, are carefully avoided.

This is nowhere more evident than where Dr. Ruff briefly and inadequately attempts to discourse on matters of substance. He accuses me, on page 75, of attempting "to back . . . generalizations by selected statements from various contemporary observers and biographers." He is right, finally. But his assertion that I used an unreliable authority in quoting J. B. Thornhill on economic and political matters, is unfortunate. It does not follow that because Mr. Thornhill had peculiar and prejudicial views on race, which were quite widespread at the time, all of his ideas on the economics and politics of British Columbia were necessarily wrong. I am sure Dr. Ruff will agree, for example, that Mr. J. S. Woodsworth's few instances of ethnic biases, evident in his *Strangers Within Our Gates* did not necessarily disqualify much of his trenchant analysis of the social problem in Canada in the early twentieth century. Dr. Ruff runs into similar interpretive problems when he accuses me, on page 75, of taking "supporting quotations . . . out of context." His example, again, is unfortunate. The important issue discussed on pages 205-206 is John Oliver's capitulation to the beer interest — and to the thirst of the wage workers — and the James Morton quote on page 206 is used to illustrate the premier's sorrow upon surrender. The capitulation, Dr. Ruff will appreciate, began with Oliver's agreement to hold a referendum on the sale of beer by the glass.

Dr. Ruff's remaining few excursions into content and interpretation are similarly picayune. He casually disposes of my 37 page portrait of the B.C. economy and social structure in the introductory chapter with the sweeping generalization that such "sweeping generalizations are much too facile to be taken as profound insights into the political process." His assertion that "The classic interpretation of the period prior to the introduction of party lines as one of intense political instability is readily accepted without any attempt to examine other evidence of internal discipline and cohesion among the pre-party factions," has the ring of authority but none in fact. Any appreciation of the multitude of elections, government turnovers, and new premierships, which I document in the latter half of chapter two is sufficient proof, quite apart from any concocted indices, of a lack of "internal discipline and cohesion." Nor should the assertion on page 70 that there is nothing new at all in *The Rush for Spoils* be taken seriously. No evidence is provided for a statement which betrays a remarkable lack of appreciation of the perspective of earlier

historians like R. E. Gosnell, F. W. Howay and Margaret Ormsby, whose sunny Okanagan view whitewashes and distorts key elements in the province's history. His assertion that I fail to "acknowledge" Miss Ormsby's work on rural politics and the United Farmers of British Columbia is meaningless. I do not usually acknowledge works I am in no way indebted to, or do not use. As my footnotes illustrate, my discussion of the politics of the farmers is based entirely on other, more valuable sources. In her essay on the U.F.B.C. in the *B.C. Historical Quarterly* which Dr. Ruff mentions, Miss Ormsby spends two paragraphs on the social bases of agrarian conservatism: I set aside six pages in a more elaborate treatment of the same subject. As for the Provincial Party and its relation to the U.F.B.C., there is clearly a difference between Miss Ormsby's focus in the rural roots of the party and my own emphasis on the dominance of the urban and Conservative section led by A. D. McRae.

But distinctions, whether fine or otherwise, seem to little trouble Dr. Norman Ruff who, being a student of Oliver Goldsmith, might again peer into the Advertisement to the *Vicar of Wakefield* where it is written "There are an hundred faults in this *Thing*." No other word, I would suggest, except perhaps Curio, could better describe Dr. Ruff's shoddy exercise in junior editing.

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