

ANNOTATIONS

A HISTORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH¹

ANY one who decides to master a special field of knowledge, and to make a life career of that area, must possess a full understanding of the historical development of his chosen field. This axiom is particularly true of a social science, such as the area of public health.

Dr. Rosen has made this knowledge available to the student of public health. For many years, Dr. Rosen has been interested in the flow of events that has occurred, as the science of public health slowly emerged and became an integral part of the daily life of the people. He set for himself the enormous task of collecting all the data that have related to the development of the public health concept from ancient times to the present day and from all parts of the world. After a painstaking collection of a wealth of material, he selected the pertinent information and interpreted it for his readers. The basic public health philosophy that has been developed through the centuries is presented in this book.

This concept is, in essence, that the community has a *direct responsibility* for the protection and promotion of the health and welfare of the individual, and that the individual has, in turn, a direct responsibility to aid the community in protection of community health, even though this may result in personal sacrifice.

As Dr. Rosen states in the text:

The aim of this book is to tell the story of community health action, from its beginning in the earliest civilization to the state

¹ Rosen, George, M.D., Ph.D. M.P.H. (with a foreword by Felix Marti Ibañez, M.D.): A HISTORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH. New York, M. D. Publications, Inc., 1958.

of development achieved at the present in economically and technologically advanced countries of the world.

The text is divided into sections that have a chronological sequence:

- I. The Origins of Public Health
- II. Health and the Community in the Greco-Roman World
- III. Public Health in the Middle Ages
- IV. Mercantilism, Absolutism and the Health of the People—1500–1750
- V. Health in a Period of Enlightenment and Revolution—1750–1830
- VI. Industrialism and the Sanitary Movement—1830–1875
- VII. The Bacteriological Era and its Aftermath—1875–1950

The early sections of the book present a great variety of interesting information relating to practices of community sanitation, personal hygiene, medical care, and particularly control of contagion that prevailed during the Greco-Roman period. To our surprise, municipal health administration was a relatively early concept, and occupational health was given due consideration in that early day.

We are accustomed to think of the Middle Ages as a period of social retrogression with little advancement of scientific knowledge. It was also an age of overwhelming pandemics, with little effective knowledge concerning disease prevention. Yet the seeds of a community program for medical care were sown at this period. Public health administration was organized by municipalities on a permanent, and not an emergency basis, and community hospitals were established, particularly for the care of persons with contagious diseases.

Perhaps the most illuminating section of the book is the chapter on "Industrialism and the Sanitary Movement—1830–1875." The part that Chadwick played in the advancement of public health, not only in Great Britain but throughout the world, is clearly presented. We also learn of the debt that American public health owes Chadwick, for it was the influence of Chadwick and his colleagues that resulted directly

in the initiation of sound public health practices in the Western continent.

“The Bacteriological Era and its Aftermath—1875–1950” covers the period of development of public health with which the reader is most familiar. Dr. Rosen emphasizes the fact that, for the first time, the concept of prevention of illnesses could be fully implemented on a rational and comprehensive basis.

Dr. Rosen did not attempt to write a last chapter concerning present trends in public health development. In this he was wise, for interpretation of “contemporary history” is a treacherous field.

Certainly a new concept has arisen during the past half century which is not a direct aftermath of the Bacteriological Era. This growing preoccupation of the students of public health is concerned with the degree and extent—e.g. the breadth and depth of community responsibility for the *comprehensive medical and health care* of the individual and his family. The history of the development of this phase of public health will be the subject of another text some 50 years hence.

Dr. Rosen has provided us with a splendid bibliography, and a well-prepared index.

There is an appendix on “Memorable Figures in the History of Public Health.” The list of names is well-selected and informative. Your reviewer regrets, however, the omission of the names of W. T. Sedgwick and M. J. Rosenau.

As a final appendix, one finds a useful list of current public health periodicals from all parts of the world, and also a list of Schools of Public Health throughout the world. The list is arranged by countries.

A HISTORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH was published by M. D. Publications, Inc. It is one of a group of monographs on Medical History that are actually published or are contemplated. These monographs are edited by Dr. Felix Marti Ibañez, Professor of The History of Medicine at New York Medical College.

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