

BOOK REVIEWS

MEDICAL CARE: PROGRAMS AND ISSUES

W. P. THOMPSON

Toronto, Clarke, Irwin & Co., Ltd., 1964, 178 pp., \$4.00.

BITTER MEDICINE: THE SASKATCHEWAN MEDICARE FEUD

E. A. TOLLEFSON

Saskatoon, Modern Press, 1964, 236 pp., \$4.50.

For three weeks in July 1962, the doctors of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan withdrew from practice, except for an emergency service. This extraordinary situation resulted from the Saskatchewan Government's attempt to force on the medical profession a universal, compulsory, tax-supported medical care program and from the profession's refusal (ultimately unsuccessful) to practice under the plan. This episode is examined in two recently published books, "Medical Care: Programs and Issues," by W. P. Thompson, and "Bitter Medicine: The Saskatchewan Medicare Feud," by E. A. Tollefson.

W. P. Thompson, a biologist and President Emeritus of the University of Saskatchewan, speaks on the basis of his experience as Chairman of the Advisory Planning Committee on Medical Care, which was appointed by the Government of Saskatchewan in 1960 to advise about a public program of medical care and which met fortnightly for more than two years. Dr. Thompson's book is the more general and the broader of the two books in scope. The first

half of it is mainly descriptive, dealing with the medical care situation in other countries, in other parts of Canada, and finally in Saskatchewan. The second half of the book considers a series of questions: whether the government *should* support a medical care program, what kind of program should be supported, how it should be implemented, its cost, how the cost should be met, how the doctors should be paid, and a few other technical matters.

E. A. Tollefson is an associate professor of law at the University of Saskatchewan. His book is more limited in its scope than Dr. Thompson's in that it does not attempt to consider whether there should or should not be a publicly supported medical care program. After pointing to the emotionalism that has surrounded the Saskatchewan medicare controversy, Professor Tollefson indicates that his interest is in the basic issues involved in the dispute. He comes to the heart of the problem he has set himself in a chapter entitled "An Assessment of the Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act, 1961." He says, "The issues in the controversy can only be discovered by determining what the College [of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan—the licensing and governing body of the profession] demanded and, without making a value judgment as to the merits of the demands, determining to what extent The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act failed to meet the College's demands." He considers the College's demands to be fourteen principles set forth by the Canadian Medical Association in 1960, at which time the Association in a statement of policy said that it would "support any program of medical services insurance which adheres to the following [i.e., the fourteen] principles." Subsequently, the College, in its submission to the committee headed by Dr. Thompson, had "quoted and 'completely endorsed' " the Canadian Medical Association's statement of policy on health insurance.

Professor Tollefson examines the fourteen principles, one by one, to see whether the Act corresponded or conflicted with them. At the end of this most interesting and important chapter, his conclusion is that "with a few minor amendments the Act would have satisfied all of the requirements set out in the Canadian Medical Association's statement of policy on health insurance programs," and thus the

bitter fight that followed could have been avoided. In reaching this conclusion, he assumes that the Association in making its statement of policy and the College in endorsing it "intended the promise contained therein to be binding upon themselves." A question that arises persistently in this reviewer's mind is whether the profession fully realized to what it was pledging itself.

The remaining chapters deal with the events following the passing of the Act, including the deterioration of relations between the College and the Government, a consideration of the amendments passed in April 1962, the "strike," which ended with the Saskatoon Agreement, and an examination of the amendments passed in August 1962.

One of the most important differences between the two books is in the matter of the authors' impartiality. Dr. Thompson says that he has "taken a very definite stand on this controversial subject," but he states that he has done his best to give the opinions, the arguments, and the evidence of those who do not agree with him. To have taken a definite stand, in so far as it is supported by evidence, is not in the least objectionable. It is to be noted, however, that the author has permitted himself at intervals to use language which suggests a prejudice against the medical profession. Thus, in the second paragraph of the first chapter, his allusion to "the efforts of the master propagandists of the American Medical Association and of their somewhat more restrained and scrupulous confreres in Canada" carries with it a pejorative connotation, which, however justified it *may* be in fact, tends, in the absence of any proof, to rouse skepticism in the critical reader.

Professor Tollefson says that his book "is not meant to be a legal brief for one side or the other. On the contrary, the objective . . . is to present the law and the relevant facts from an academic point of view, avoiding the excesses of partisanship." In this, he has been outstandingly successful. Though one may disagree with him in places—and, for this reviewer, these tend to be those passages in which he steps outside the domain of strictly legal considerations into the realm of politics or sociology—and though occasionally he shows a lack of understanding of the medical profession or its functioning,

nowhere does he appear to have a personal preference for one side or the other.

Dr. Thompson, addressing himself to the general reader, has not considered it necessary to document his book fully. Professor Tollefson's book, on the other hand, is excellently documented. Especially valuable are the appendices, which reproduce not only The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act, 1961, and the amending legislation but also the letters that passed from the Government of Saskatchewan to the College of Physicians and Surgeons between December 1959, and July 1962. It is regrettable that permission was not granted by the College to reproduce its part of the correspondence.

Both books contain factual material which should be of interest to the general reader and which, at least in part, would probably be unknown to many physicians. Neither singly nor together, however, do these books cover the subject of medical care adequately to enable the reader to evaluate it. Two respects in which Dr. Thompson's book is deficient call for mention. First, some subjects that one might have expected to be covered in detail are dealt with superficially. Thus, in view of the effect (whether justified or unjustified) of Britain's National Health Service on the thinking of the Canadian medical profession, Dr. Thompson might well have been expected to discuss the National Health Service in detail; but, in fact, he never really comes to grips with it. His evaluation of it, apart from a few passing comments scattered through the book, is contained in two and a half pages. These are devoted mainly to relaying the conclusions reached in two studies carried out by Americans, one being a professor of economics, the other a professor of history. However objective and meritorious these reports may be, it is regrettable that Dr. Thompson does not cite anything from the writings of British physicians either for or against the National Health Service. Another matter that is of the greatest importance but that receives little attention is the *quality* of medical care. Secondly, in the matter of argument, though Dr. Thompson is convincing in some places, in others he makes assertions that the reader is required to take on trust.

Professor Tollefson's argument is precise and, with few excep-

tions, most persuasive. His approach, however, is more restricted than Dr. Thompson's. Yet, in considering the legal aspects of the Saskatchewan dispute, he performs a most useful service; and his book, especially the chapter comparing the Act with the profession's fourteen principles, should be read by all physicians. One of the most important points that emerges is that a full understanding of the legislation required a knowledge of a number of principles of law, which only exceptionally would be known to those not trained in the law. From this, two lessons may be learned, which might serve to prevent similar episodes in the future. First, those drafting such legislation, especially if it is likely to prove controversial, should make every effort to make its meaning clear to those to whom it will apply. Secondly, it appears that, if a better relationship is to be developed between the medical profession and the rest of society, the profession needs—and is going to need more and more as medical care programs are developed in other parts of North America—not public relations technicians but leaders who, in addition to their familiarity with medicine, are educated also in the principles of those disciplines that deal with the relationships between various parts of society: the law, sociology, and political science. So educated, a relatively small number of medical leaders could do much to restore harmony between the profession and the rest of society by interpreting the position of each to the other.

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