

## Essay Review

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A. R. HALL and B. A. BEMBRIDGE, *Physic and philanthropy. A history of the Wellcome Trust 1936–1986*, with a foreword by Sir David Steel, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 8vo, pp. 462, [price to be decided].

During the latter half of the last century, the creation of wealth in the capitalist societies of the Western World led to the progressive accumulation of riches by an élite group of entrepreneurs, whose industrial enterprises were vitally important to the emergent economies of the modern era. John D. Rockefeller, whose fortune was based on oil, Andrew Carnegie, the formidable steel magnate, and Johns Hopkins, a railway developer, were all examples of barons of industry in the United States who created commercial empires in the period of expansion and development that followed the ending of the American Civil War. With enormous wealth at their disposal, they all turned to philanthropy and by the endowments that led to the creation of the Johns Hopkins University and Medical School at Baltimore, and of the Rockefeller Institute in New York City, both Hopkins and Rockefeller were to play a pivotal role in the development of medical research and education in the United States.

On this side of the Atlantic, the commercial empires that have provided the wealth to influence medical research and teaching in this country developed somewhat later than in the United States. Lord Nuffield's fortune was based on the boom in motor-car ownership that followed the First World War. It was Lord Nuffield who made so significant a contribution to medical education by his endowment of the Nuffield Professorships at the University of Oxford in 1936. In that year, Sir Henry Wellcome, founder of the great pharmaceutical enterprise which bears his name, died in London. Wellcome was a product of that same technologically exciting and entrepreneurial American society of the later years of the nineteenth century that had given Rockefeller and Carnegie their opportunity. Originally an American from the mid-west, Wellcome had worked at an upcountry drugstore owned by an uncle, and he had been a travelling drug salesman. In 1880, however, struck by the commercial opportunities opening up in Great Britain, he formed a partnership with Silas Burroughs with the intention of introducing into Britain the manufacture of ready-made pills, which he called "Tabloids", a new technology being developed in the United States. It was an immensely successful venture. Silas Burroughs died in 1895, and when Wellcome followed him to his maker more than forty years later, he controlled one of the largest industrial fortunes in this country. The puritanical son of a missionary father, he was, like John D. Rockefeller, imbued with a moral responsibility toward his fellow men and their misfortunes and it was this that guided many of his actions throughout his long life. At his death, he left his entire fortune and his commercial enterprises to Trustees who were to continue to control his business as sole shareholders. The Wellcome Trust, created under the terms of his will, has had a major influence through the years on those wide-ranging interests that occupied Sir Henry throughout his life—medical and scientific research, the history of medicine and the preservation of ancient texts and books, veterinary medicine, tropical disease, as well as archaeology and the collection of virtually every type of interesting artefact, particularly those relating to medicine and its history.

*Physic and philanthropy* is the remarkable story of the Wellcome Trust during the fifty years that have passed since Wellcome died. Sir David Steel, Chairman of the Wellcome Trustees, in his introduction, describes how although the Trust in its early years, under Sir Henry Dale's wise and measured guidance, could do little better than to "lay the sound foundations for future activity", in the past fifteen years, it has "become a large and powerful organisation with wide international responsibilities and a formidable body of scientific expertise at its disposal."

The distinction between the Wellcome Trust and the Foundation must first be clearly made. The Wellcome Trustees are the shareholders and beneficiaries of the profits of the Wellcome pharmaceutical company, which is known as the Wellcome Foundation. The Foundation, in contrast to the use of this term in other contexts, is not the charitable body but the business itself. The Foundation has its own research laboratories, dedicated to work directly related to the company's pharmaceutical concerns, but it is the Wellcome Trust, using the the profits accruing to it from the Foundation, that supports medical research both nationally and internationally, as

well as supporting its Institute for the History of Medicine, which includes the Wellcome Library, and studies of the history of medicine.

The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with the origins and evolution of the Trust, the second with its impact on medical science. In the early chapters, Professor Rupert Hall gives a masterly account of the manner in which the early Trustees found their way through the labyrinthine terms of Sir Henry Wellcome's will, the legal processes that were necessary to establish the Trust as an effective organization, and the complex and often difficult negotiations that were necessary to establish a satisfactory relationship between the Trust and the Wellcome Foundation. There were also the problems of creating some sort of order out of Wellcome's Museum and Library and the extraordinarily rich collections amassed during his lifetime, which were kept in packing cases or on shelving that occupied thousands of square feet of warehouse space. It was a slow process, but gradually order was established. Soon after the end of the Second World War, a start was made on distributing the important ethnographic material to museums, such as the British Museum, the Auckland Institute in New Zealand, the Museum für Volkerkunde at Frankfurt, the University of California, and many other institutions throughout the world that have benefited from the Trustees' generosity. At the same time, as the financial position of the Foundation was placed on a firmer footing, the Trustees were able to provide support for bodies such as the Royal College of Surgeons and the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London, and to establish Wellcome Research Fellowships for the first time. Throughout this period, close relationships were established with the Medical Research Council, whose national commitment to medical research somewhat overshadowed the activities of the Trust in those early years.

Subsequent chapters deal with the formulation of policy until 1964, the vision of a grand design for the future and the implementation of that design as the organization expanded. In 1959–60, the charitable expenditure of the Trust was still only £735,000. By 1960–62, this had risen to £2,730,000 and it was during this period that the Trust established their highly prized Senior Research Fellowships in Clinical Science. Since then, the Trust's activities in the support of medical research have progressively expanded, so that from small beginnings a Trust has now been created which, with the release to the open market this year of a proportion of the Trustees' shares in the Foundation, will control expenditure of more than £40 million per annum.

Professor Hall's chapter on 'Recasting Medical History' is an admirable account of the Trust's achievements in establishing medical history as an academic discipline in this country. The Museum and Library were originally organs of the Foundation. The story of how the Trustees took over responsibility for these institutions and how they established an internationally renowned Institute for the History of Medicine in Euston Road, with the support of such outstanding historians as F. N. L. Poynter, is brilliantly told. In recent years, the Trust's commitment to medical history has been further consolidated by the creation of academic units within the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Glasgow, and University College London. At the same time, the Trustees were able to arrange that the Museum should be handed over to the Science Museum at South Kensington and Wellcome's collections can now be seen by the general public in two galleries specifically devoted to the history of medicine.

The second part of the book, largely contributed by B. A. Bembridge, deals with the Trust's particularly important commitment to tropical medicine, the health of animals, clinical and related sciences, buildings and equipment, the stimulus given by the Trust to European and overseas studies and the basic sciences and medicine. Over fifty years, the Trustees have expended some £150 million on thousands of separate grants which are listed in the fifteen published biennial reports. The chapters give an account of the many ways in which the Trustees have financed medical research, as well as the fields of work that they have encouraged. Their support has been given to subjects as different as molecular biology and electron microscopy on the one hand, and the study of diarrhoea in Indian villages on the other. Individuals who have received scientific support have included Nobel laureates, distinguished Fellows of the Royal Society, as well as clinician scientists working in relatively neglected fields considered by the Trustees to deserve special encouragement, such as dermatology and mental illness. The book concludes with a chapter on the 'Past and Future' by the amiable and engaging Director of the

Trust, Dr P. O. Williams. Peter Williams, who joined the Trust from the Medical Research Council in 1960, gives a personal account of the affairs of the Trust from the vantage point of one who has had a major influence on the development of the policies of the Trust in the past two decades. He describes how the Trust has been concerned not just to respond to requests for research support, but how it has specifically developed new policies and new schemes in order to take account of the changing circumstances of medical research in the medical schools and universities of this country. He sets out the schemes for the support of clinical sciences, the arrangements for linked fellowships to allow non-clinical scientists to retain a position in their basic discipline, whilst working collaboratively in a clinical department, the schemes for the support of surgical research, and the specific University Awards which have been available to retain an outstanding individual threatening to join the "brain drain". He gives a particularly personal insight into the Trust's activities in medical history, since he acted for a short time as Director of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. He also discusses with the experience and knowledge that is uniquely his own, the problems of medical research funding and the relationship between a national body, the Medical Research Council, and the medical charities. He ends on an optimistic note which will be welcome to all who work in academic medicine. He takes the view "that the Wellcome Trust will continue to play an important role in the support of medical research in Britain, Europe, the Commonwealth and the tropics", and he hopes that the history of modern medicine will be incorporated into the activities of the Trust.

This book is a well-written and accurate account of the work of a remarkable and unique charitable Trust. The authors of *Physic and philanthropy* have both been involved in different capacities with the affairs of the Wellcome Trust for many years and for these reasons the tone of the book is naturally more modest and underwritten than its subject deserves. Whilst fascinating to read, the text tells little of the extraordinary importance of the Wellcome Trust to a whole generation of medical research workers and medical historians in this country. The Trust has given a start to their careers to many young men and women. For whole departments, the enthusiastic encouragement of the Trust and its officers has been of vital importance in the development of new initiatives. The Trust has always been more receptive of new ideas than other grant-giving bodies in this country and is always prepared to look at novel ways of doing what needs to be done. Within its elegant premises in Regent's Park, it tends to lend a more understanding ear to the problems faced by research workers than do more formally constituted bodies. For those working overseas, in Thailand, India, East Africa or Belem, the Trust has given support that has often been far more than merely scientific. As the Director points out in his concluding chapter: "A flexible, relaxed, helpful body is of great importance to those who seek funds". The academic community of this country is particularly fortunate that the Wellcome Trust has been just such an organization.

Neither should the quality of the Trustees be forgotten. The Trust has been served by some of the most distinguished scientists and men of affairs of their generation. Whilst it would be invidious to pick any out for special consideration, the contributions of Sir Henry Dale in establishing the Trust in its early days cannot be underestimated. Subsequent Chairmen of the Trustees have included Lord Piercy and Lord Franks, who presided with wisdom and magisterial dignity over the major developments made possible by the expansion of the Trust's resources between 1963 and 1982.

The book is a testimony to a remarkable story. It will be of inestimable value to historians of medical research in the modern era, as well as providing an insight into the funding of research that will be fascinating to the general reader. It illustrates, too, not only the remarkable entrepreneurial skills of Sir Henry Wellcome himself, from his beginnings in an American drugstore to his establishment of a prestigious pharmaceutical organization, but also the wisdom, imagination, and enterprise that his Trustees and their officers have shown in guiding the affairs of his Trust. Sir Henry Wellcome has been well served.

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