

## Book Reviews

### STUDENTS IN BRITAIN

#### The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain

By Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson. Pp. x+186. (Macmillan: London, September 1970.) 50s boards; 20s paper.

"Who do they think they are?" About a year ago a more colourful version of this rhetorical question was put to me by an angry middle-aged Derbyshire miner who was much troubled by what he regarded as the lunatic activities of some university students. He was especially indignant at their apparent misuse of educational opportunities which he had wanted for himself twenty years ago but which he had been denied. Particularly galling to him was the thought that his money was being spent on university education when capital expenditure on the primary and secondary schools of his area was desperately needed, and he urged me to throw these wastrels and mischief-makers out of the university. I imagine all vice-chancellors and academics can recall similar experiences and have faltered for words to explain that universities are places where reasonable dissent must be not merely tolerated but encouraged, that it is inherently desirable that there should be responsible student leaders but that these can often only remain in office and repel the extremists by stealing some of the latter's fire, and that current student unrest should be seen in its historical perspective. Had we read Ashby and Anderson's book, how much better might our answers have been.

The authors trace the growth of the student movement in Britain over the past 150 years. It is, no doubt, historically accurate. I am no judge of this, but my own close contact with students in Oxbridge and civic universities convinces me that even if professional historians should subsequently find fault with some of the facts the interpretations of the events recorded in this chronicle are all fundamentally sound. Every page makes compelling reading, and there are many treasures in the form of bizarre facts or wise and perceptive judgments. Who would think that the notion of a self-governing hall was current and acted on in Edinburgh 83 years ago, or would consider it likely that the predominance of medical students once made for a lively and active student body, or that the National Union of Students owed much more in its early days not only to its first president (Macadam), but also to those pillars of the establishment of the 1920s, such as Nancy Astor, Lord Haldane and the editors of *The Times* and *The Observer*? Also interesting and slightly surprising is the fact that many current issues concerning the status and role of students in universities were initially raised many years ago only to be dropped and either resuscitated or even rediscovered several years later. Quite frequently distinguished men and women unconnected with the organized student movement have been more cogent and passionate advocates of reform of the curriculum, of pedagogic method, of examinations and university structure than the students.

The final chapter called "The Conscience of the Student Estate" is of outstanding interest. It contains a brilliant analysis of the elements of the student body; identifying

the dedicated wreckers uninterested in reform and devoid of hope or humour who would smash their own student union as willingly as their university, and whose tortured minds are nourished by absurd slogans such as "creative vandalism" and "repressive tolerance". It is full of sound advice to administrators on how to de-escalate situations deliberately contrived to lead to confrontation; it spells out why "open democracy" can never work, and how power in the university is so widely diffused that to seek the source of power is to chase a will-o'-the-wisp. The knife edge trodden by academics between hated paternalism, on the one hand, and equally disliked indifference, on the other, is made plain. The NUS receives generous tribute for its common sense and responsibility, but is brought face to face with the stark alternatives: either that students are to be regarded as part of the community of the university and eligible for representation on committees, in which case their union, like any other constituent official body of the university, must be regulated by the university; or the union is like a trade union claiming autonomy and negotiating rights, in which case student membership of university committees is ludicrously inappropriate.

There is singularly little evasion of issues but perhaps the most important question of all is left open, namely, whether the growth of the student estate has led to any substantial improvement of the education of 18-21 year olds which might otherwise not have occurred. In so far as the single most influential factor in education is the attitude of a teacher towards his pupils, and in particular his feeling of commitment to them, it seems doubtful to me that the organized student movement has made any real gains for the student. It could even be argued that in the past two years as the direct result of student activities there has been a decline in morale and staff concern for students which will take a long time to repair. Meanwhile, this book should be compulsory reading for all dons and students.

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### MEDICS THROUGH THE AGES

#### The History of Medical Education

An International Symposium held February 5-9, 1968. By C. D. O'Malley. (UCLA Forum in Medical Sciences No. 12.) Pp. xii+548. (University of California: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, August 1970.) 190s.

In February 1968 a symposium on the history of medical education, organized by the late Professor C. D. O'Malley, was held at the University of California at Los Angeles. The papers, which were read by nineteen international experts, have now been collected together with illustrations and an index which includes far more individuals' names than subject titles. The articles are arranged in four groups, the first two being chronological periods and the remainder geographical. The opening section, "The Earlier Period in the West", deals with classical antiquity, medieval Islam, the middle ages, and the renaissance. "The Modern Period" includes essays on medical education in the major European countries, and "Eastern Europe and the Far East" covers Russia, India, south-east Asia, and Japan. Finally, "Western Hemisphere" is concerned with Iberia and Ibero-America, and with the United States before 1900, and in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each paper is the work of an outstanding scholar and they are all of high quality, being well written and impeccably documented. There is, however, some variation in size, for, whereas France occupies 52 pages, Ibero-America 44 and classical antiquity, India and Scandinavia 37 pages each, Scotland has 11, England and Italy 14½ each, the Netherlands 15½ and Germany 28. There is therefore some degree of disproportionate representation, as measured by importance and overall contribution. In the case of Austria,