

An extract from: *“Poems from Prison”* by Archie Leman Cochrane*

‘Superfluous Doctors’

(The situation in Salonica deteriorated rapidly. We were all desperately hungry. Several prisoners had been shot. There were epidemics of Typhoid, Diphtheria, Hepatitis, and Sandfly fever and more than 300 cases of “starvation oedema”. I asked the German “Stabsarzt” for another P.O.W. doctor to help me. He replied “No, doctors are superfluous”. He was technically right, but it made me furious at the time.)

*“Superfluous Doctors” – what a phrase to rouse
Dulled prison fires to flicker with the muse
And build a brave new world. There would be
No famines, wars, or other acts of God
To break the Peace on Earth. No! man would turn
From wanton killing of his cousin’s kin
To face his very foes, and Science, Art
With Labour in ally, would fight and kill
Want and its fears, disease, its very roots,
Squalor and filth and loneliness and pain,
And then let the doctors quit the centre stage
To usher in the prophylactic age.*

*But death and hunger, and prisoner’s dreams were rare.
The doctor in Salonica sat down and tore his hair.*

* Cochrane A L. Poems from prison. [Chepstow] C P Healey, 1974. (An edition of 60 copies.)