

Just published: biography of the Microbe Hunter and Health Activist, Paul de Kruif (1890-1971)

Health of Americans is in a constant state of emergency. It is under President Trump and it was under his predecessors. Under the administrations of Roosevelt and Truman, one science writer had his typewriter as a weapon against medical abuses, and a fist to bounce the table: Paul de Kruif from Zeeland MI. He was a promising bacteriologist, but wanted to share his knowledge and views on (public) health with the people at large. Thus he left the laboratory and became famous with his book *Microbe Hunters* (1926). He began to popularize medical matters: history, doctors in science, causes and cures of diseases, new drugs, vitamins and hormones, and health insurance. He wanted to let the people know about medical discoveries and public health. In that, he was appreciated by many medical friends. Though addressing the general readership (for example as star reporter of *The Reader's Digest*), many other doctors were annoyed, when patients asked about a cure that De Kruif had written about, before they had even been informed through professional channels: "that damned De Kruif again, and he is not even an M.D."

Paul de Kruif wrote some 200 articles in lay magazines, and a dozen books. He has been a catalyst in rallies against tuberculosis (Detroit) and syphilis (Chicago), was instrumental in revealing staggering death rates of mothers and their newborns, in steering polio research and in improving the people's diet (vitamin-enrichment of bread). As a champion for the poor, he was on speaking terms with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, close friend of Vice-President Henry Wallace and Surgeon General Thomas Parran. Industrialists like George Kettering (G.M. Motors) and Henry Kaiser (of the Permanente) appreciated him. Paul also had friendly contacts with some major literary authors: Sinclair Lewis (with whom he wrote *Arrowsmith*), Henry L. Mencken (a longtime friend), Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck.

De Kruif was in a constant state of emergency himself, always go-go-go, politically swinging from progressive during the great Depression, to radical socialist ("pinko") when it came to public health; then, disappointed by the role of Soviet Russia, to the middle of the road; finally, making peace with the medical hierarchy of the American Medical Association, he turned conservative (no socialized medicine, no compulsory health insurance). At the same time, and after long being an atheist (with a Dutch-Calvinistic background in Zeeland MI), believing in medical science as the bringer of health and happiness, he finally converted back to religion (thanks to AA brothers).

Read about this versatile journalist and reporter of medical advances and conservatism, and compare his struggle with present day medical politics and controversies:

***A Constant State of Emergency. Paul de Kruif, Microbe Hunter and Health Activist*, written by the Dutch scientist and medical historian Jan Peter Verhave, published by the Van Raalte Press, Holland MI (richly illustrated; 678 pages).**

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