

## Book Reviews

improvements in health statistics during the nineteenth century were to be explained by improvements in nutrition rather than by medical advances or other factors. Modern knowledge certainly confirms the inadequacy of some of the early records. Thus the diet thought to be representative for peasants in sixteenth-century Poland contains no vitamin C. The probable explanation is found in another chapter: records are often confined to regular purchases of food or donations in kind from an employer, so that items like vegetables and fruit that are in intermittent supply or gathered by the people themselves are omitted. The introduction of potatoes to the Swedish diet is discussed, but I saw no reference to its generally accepted importance in eliminating winter scurvy from Scandinavia through their contribution of vitamin C. But it would be unfair to emphasize what the book does *not* contain. It provides a unique reference source that puts food into the context of the history of culture, as well as of agricultural production and biochemical need.

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NIKOLAI IVANOVICH PIROGOV, *Questions of life: diary of an old physician*, ed. Galina V. Zarechnak, Resources in Medical History series, Canton, MA, Science History Publications, USA, 1991, pp. xxxiv, 480, \$29.95 (0-988135-061-3).

Nikolai Pirogov, "The Father of Russian Surgery", was born in 1810 and died just seventy-one years later, having developed a number of operative techniques and introduced rectal and intravenous anaesthesia into surgical practice. He was the first Russian surgeon to use ether under battle conditions (at the siege of Sebastopol in 1854) and during a visit to Heidelberg in 1862 he treated Garibaldi. His life encompassed some of the major events of nineteenth-century Russia: Napoleon's invasion and retreat (just); the Decembrist uprising; the emancipation of the serfs; and the assassination of Alexander II (just). It also coincided with the golden age of Russian literature, the period of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoevsky and a host of other writers, although little mention is made of them in this discursive autobiography.

The volume, which uneasily mixes a retrospective chronicle with the contemporary diary of the elderly Pirogov, written in his final year, is divided into two uneven parts: the introductory section of his daily journal is a reflective consideration of the responsibilities of autobiographical writing and the nature of memory. The more substantial part of the book provides a roughly chronological account of his life, predominantly childhood, education and University training, although later events are also recorded. Interpolated into this part is comment from 1881, most notably a section on Alexander II's assassination, which is disconcertingly inserted in the text at the time of Pirogov's arrival at Moscow University in 1824.

Encouraged by the family physician who was also Professor of Surgery, the precocious Pirogov, two years below the entrance age of sixteen, entered the University to study medicine. He enrolled before the storm unleashed by the Decembrists turned Russian universities into deeply troubled places, with their internal police forces, informers and private prisons, a period so eloquently described by Pirogov's almost exact contemporary, Alexander Herzen.

Pirogov's medical training was almost entirely derived from books and lectures. He witnessed only a couple of operations and had no first hand experience of dissections. Not until he reached Dorpat University in 1828, one of a privileged group of Russian students sent to study there, did he feel the need, stimulated by the Estonian surgeon Ivan Moier, to engage in practical anatomy and surgery, in which he prepared and defended his doctoral dissertation in 1833. He was then favoured further, allowed to travel abroad for advanced study, although not to France or England. Arriving in Berlin he signed up for additional anatomical dissections and clinical lectures with Schlemm, Dieffenbach and Gräfe, but attended only part of the physiology course offered by Johannes Müller, here fussily interrupting a lecture to check the student passes of his audience.

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Pirogov returned to Dorpat as Professor of Surgery, and was thence transferred to the St Petersburg Medical and Surgical Academy, where appalling conditions prevailed, with no operating room and with corrupt medical attendants who transferred dressings and bandages from one patient to the next, and adulterated the food and medicine. Unfortunately Pirogov's time was running out when he reached this part of his memoirs, and he died before it was completed.

Like many a good nineteenth-century Russian novel, *Questions of life* has a fair sprinkling of unusual characters. The Scottish surgeon Sir James Wylie appears in strange disguise, sometimes as Baronet Willie, sometimes as Baronet Villiers, but always irascible. Pirogov's companion in Dorpat, Vladimir Dal' a virtuoso on the mouth organ, demonstrated his wider versatility by serving with distinction in the Turkish War as a sapper and then as an engineer, before turning to medicine as a military physician. He next developed a literary career and became a Government administrator whilst a member of the "Pirogov circle", the small Dorpat medical society that met for papers and discussion on a regular basis. The role and acceptability of Germans in Russia, their different national characteristics and the allure of European science and medicine are all addressed. Pirogov also describes medical education and practice in the several Russian and European centres in which he worked during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, but the accessibility of these accounts is hampered by the arrangement of the volume, which seems to be a faithful rendition of Pirogov's original manuscript: there is unnecessary repetition, and the mixture of chronicle and diary is messy and sometimes downright confusing. Clearly Dr Zarechnak belongs to the non-interventionist school of editing, and her translation into American—Pirogov reflecting of what sort of "guy" he had been; Liebig's father owning a "drugstore"—is also irritating. These flaws are a great pity, as so little Pirogov material is readily available in English.

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BONNIE ELLEN BLUSTEIN, *Preserve your love for science: life of William A. Hammond, American neurologist*, Cambridge History of Science, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. x, 289, illus., £35.00, \$54.95 (0-521-39262-4).

William Alexander Hammond (1828–1900), one of the founding generation of American neurologists, enjoyed a long and remarkably varied career. Beginning as a frontier surgeon in the U.S. army, he initially won a reputation as a natural history collector and an original investigator in physiological chemistry, managing somehow to conduct prize-winning laboratory experiments while posted to the wilds of the Kansas Territory in the 1850s. During the Civil War, he rose rapidly to head the Army Medical Department, aiming to use his position as Surgeon General to advance the interests and scientific standing of the medical profession.

As Blustein documents, however, Hammond's identification with the medical elite and his brash interventions to weed out incompetent doctors, as well as to curtail the use of heroic therapies he deemed valueless, alienated him from the rank and file of a deeply divided profession, leaving him vulnerable to his political enemies in Washington. Within a year and a half of his initial appointment, they struck, and when Hammond misguidedly demanded a court martial to clear his name of trumped-up charges, his opponents, led by Secretary of War Stanton, gladly obliged. After a trial lasting several months, Hammond was declared guilty of corruption and of exceeding his authority, and dismissed from his post. At the age of 35, his career apparently lay in ruins.

Some fifteen years later, he would finally vindicate himself, being officially exonerated by Secretary of War McCrary and President Hayes in 1879. In the interim, however, he had relocated to New York, where, remarkably enough, he rapidly established himself as a leader of the emerging specialty of neurology and developed an enormously lucrative practice catering to a rich clientele convinced they suffered from disorders of the "nerves". Shut out by circumstance from the laboratory, but acutely conscious of the fact that his income rested on