

## Book Reviews

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.

E. M. Tansey, Wellcome Institute

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

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his scientific reputation, Hammond now sought to apply clinical tools and methods to the resolution of neurological puzzles. Over the next two decades, though, his extravagant but ill-supported claims for his specialty, his flamboyance, and his evident opportunism gradually undermined his professional standing, even among his neurological colleagues. Increasingly isolated even in the professional organizations he had once led, he at length abandoned his thriving society practice, and removed himself to Washington, D.C., opening an opulent private sanatorium and setting up a business on the side, producing and marketing animal extracts. In the elite professional circles in which he had once moved, Hammond's reputation now sank rapidly, and by the time of his death, on 5 January 1900, most of his substantial fortune had been dissipated.

Blustein's book provides a thorough and workmanlike account of this long and colourful career. Her discussion of its professional and scientific dimensions is often acute and insightful, and she makes clever use of its vagaries to document the shifting and at times contradictory meanings of "scientific medicine" in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hammond, once one of the leading "scientific" physicians of his age, is all but forgotten in ours, remembered, if at all, as an efficient and energetic Surgeon General in the Civil War years who was brought down by political intrigue. The clinical orientation he attempted to establish as the foundation for medical research has rapidly given ground, unable to compete successfully with the laboratory medicine practised in the medical schools, research institutes and hospitals. In his own eyes the centrepiece of his life, "Hammond's scientific work had already, by the end of his life, come to be seen not so much as mistaken as beside the point" (p. 233). His career, however, has much to teach us about the social context of late nineteenth-century American medicine.

Andrew Scull, University of California, San Diego

NAOMI ROGERS, *Dirt and disease: polio before FDR*, Health and Medicine in American Society series, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1992, pp. x, 258, illus., \$39.00 (hardback, 0-1835-1785-0), \$15.00 (paperback, 0-1835-1786-9).

A hundred years ago epidemic polio was a new and frightening phenomenon. Today, following the development of effective vaccines in the 1950s, it has all but dropped from the consciousness of the developed world. But history does not set precedents for the future: not all epidemics can hope for such speedy elimination, and no prospects for AIDS can be deduced from the history of polio. By contrast, the lessons of the present may inform our exploration of the past. In this book Naomi Rogers has used the consciousness of the social meaning of epidemics derived from AIDS, to explore the American experience of polio in 1916.

The social response of Americans to the 1916 polio epidemic reflected a society in which medicine, and the public perception of it, were at a crossroads. The new scientific medicine was active and accepted, but when science failed to provide answers, resort was still made to traditional hygienic explanations. Thus while doctors experimented with anti-polio sera and fiddled with lumbar punctures, and home healers wrote in their hundreds offering assistance to the scientific authorities, the general public were being urged to keep clean, eliminate flies and eat properly. American society had not yet moved beyond its nineteenth-century conceptions, either socially or scientifically, and it still looked to traditional scapegoats in times of epidemic crisis. Notably, even the scientists refused to recognize that the problem might lie among the clean middle classes and not in the festering slums of recent immigrants. Popular perspectives were beginning to change, as reflected in hopes that science would either provide or endorse a solution to the problem of polio, but public responses to the epidemic also revealed anxieties about the ecological consequences of modern life—about automobile fumes and canned food as well as about faulty drains and filthy privies.

This is the situation deftly described by Rogers in her thoughtful and concisely-written book. As she notes, the polio story has "long been considered one of scientists and science", of progress and success, and has until now been neglected by social and medical historians. In