

## Book Reviews

Over the years, the CDC has undergone many reorganizations to accommodate to its expanding functions. The latest has resulted in six Centers for: chronic disease prevention and health promotion, environmental health and injury control, infectious diseases, prevention services, health statistics nationally, and occupational safety and health. In addition there are three Offices for the epidemiology programme, international health, and public health practice. The book concludes with the epidemiological bombshell of the AIDS epidemic, and the role that the CDC played in identification of the virus. This chapter unfortunately is far from completed.

The great virtue of this book is its thoroughness in analysing an important public health institution, through exploration of its fifty-year history. Perhaps this is also its only weakness. The account is so detailed that one may sometimes lose sight of the large trends. The discussion at several places, for example, of CDC's adventures in acquiring one or more new buildings gives us more than we need to know. All things considered, this account by a professional historian demonstrates very well indeed the contribution of history to an understanding of the present in health affairs.

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HANS J. TEUTEBERG (ed.), *European food history: a research review*, Leicester University Press, 1992, pp. xii, 297, £55.00 (0-7185-1383-5).

This volume is intended primarily to be an annotated bibliography. Scholars from thirteen countries discuss, and then list, the main publications relating to the food history of their regions of Northern and Central Europe. The aim is: "to clarify not only what and how much was eaten . . . but, above all, for what reasons something was eaten in a specific way . . . [and] to look at the changes in food behaviour at different times." Hans Teuteberg comments that: "there has been much naive and uncritical publication in this field, pretending knowledge that we do not really have." There is reference in one chapter to a paper in which agricultural workers in Sweden were calculated to have received 3,523 kcalories per day in the seventeenth century. Even today, one could not determine an individual subject's intake to the nearest kcalorie, and the energy contributed by the "pound of meat" in an old record could vary anywhere from 800 to 1800 kcal. according to how fat it was. Early writers were most interested in spectacular feasts at royal courts, or in folk traditions and recording just the meals associated with Easter, Christmas, etc. Concern with the regular diet of ordinary people was stimulated by the French historian, Fernand Braudel who believed that the production of food and its availability to the population was a key long-term factor limiting historical development. The papers that followed in the 1960s typically described eighteenth- and nineteenth-century records of the rations provided for people in organizations such as armies, monasteries and hospitals, and estimated their nutritive value. Since then, there has been a feeling of frustration that such records were still not representative of the bulk of ordinary families having to find their own provisions. However, from studies of recorded incomes and food prices, together with town records where tolls were paid on merchandise coming into their markets, it has been possible to estimate the patterns of food consumed in particular communities and what the workers could have afforded. It seems agreed that in earlier centuries, and even as late as 1870, a working-class family typically had to spend 70% of its income on food, compared with about 25% today. Unless there were bad harvests or severe unemployment, the people could satisfy their nutritional needs, but with little margin for other expenditure. Bread provided one half of the total energy, except where potatoes had become the staple as in Ireland and Poland. Fat consumption was extremely low. Meat consumption had previously been higher. But, after 1700 with populations increasing, animal pastures were sacrificed to cereal production, and meat became a luxury.

Medical historians are concerned with the extent to which poor nutrition could have been responsible for retarded growth and ill health. This is not an important concern for the authors, though several comment that they found little support for Thomas McKeown's thesis that

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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.