

### Book Reviews

ALFRED E. CORNEBISE, *Typhus and doughboys. The American Polish Typhus Relief Expedition 1919–21*, Newark, NJ, University of Delaware Press; Toronto and London, Associated University Presses, 1982, 8vo, pp. 188, illus., £16.60.

To preserve his sanity during the Russian Civil War, so Pasternak tells us, Dr Zhivago threw himself into the care of victims of typhus, which in many parts of Eastern Europe had reached epidemic proportions at the end of the First World War. As Dr Cornebise shows, Zhivago was not the only physician at work in this field. A number of Americans were attached to a relief expedition, the course of which is the subject of the book under review. As an insight into the state of affairs in Poland in 1919–20, nothing could be further removed from the poetry of Pasternak. Indeed, the word “prosaic” is slightly flattering, in that this study is even more old-fashioned than the events it portrays. It purports to show American humanitarianism at work, and such sentiments undoubtedly informed the work of individual physicians. But to relegate to a footnote (p. 152) the obvious parallel between building a cordon sanitaire to protect Western Europe from the ravages of disease *and* building one to hold back the dangers of Bolshevism is to obscure the underlying intent of American policy in Poland in this period. The naïveté of this work is reflected not only in its acceptance as truth of the claims of American propaganda, but also in the limited sources on which it rests. There is no reference to Polish sources, medical or otherwise, against which to place the claims of the American officials and doctors who were engaged in a complicated logistical and administrative operation. There is nothing on the state of public health in Poland before or after the Americans arrived, and little on the structure of the Polish Ministry of Health or the Medical Corps of the Polish Army, through which the American relief expedition operated. This book can be read, therefore, as a curiosity, telling a story no one has told before, or else as an example of the dangers of antiquarianism masquerading as medical history.

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