

to interview members of Wilson's family, and a number of former students and others who knew him. She presents a convincing picture of a man whose contributions to science and to the country to which he devoted most of his working life deserve to be better known. The book is more than a biography of one individual; its wide-ranging discussion makes it a notable contribution, as well, to the history of science and to Australian intellectual history.

R. W. Home
University of Melbourne

Medical Geography in Historical Perspective. Edited by Nicholaas A. Rupke (Medical History, Supplement No. 20, Wellcome Trust Center for the History of Medicine at UCL, 2000, ISBN 0 85484 072 9).

MEDICAL GEOGRAPHY WAS A DOCTRINE OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL determinist epidemiology that flourished in Western Europe, Germany especially, in the nineteenth century. Geographers, medical practitioners and sanitary reformers with nationalist-imperialist ambitions were leading proponents. Ordinary folk, as C. S. Valencius displays in a splendid paper on the European occupation of Arkansas and Missouri before the Civil War, also held common beliefs about healthy dry, breezy hills, threatening sites of miasmas, the release of effluvia by disturbances to the pristine natural order, and the constant need in dangerous places to husband personal 'vital power'. The intellectual structure of medical geography was built from dubious nosologies and scrappy but pretentious geographic information. Most of the system crashed with the move to germ theory. Its legacies include such specialties as high latitude and altitude medicine and 'tropical' medicine. The new science of environmental pollution hazards and pathologies seems to owe little to its coarse-grained, assertive forerunner.

This collection derives from a conference at Gottingen in 1996. The topics range across continents and periods, reflecting the visions of nineteenth-century believers; but the quality is variable, with a few papers makeweight. The liveliest and clearest contributions include Frank Barrett on August Hirsch, Warwick Anderson on the debate about the prospects for white supremacy in 'tropical' Australia, and the papers by Anne Buttimer and Ronald Numbers on the Hippocratic tradition of airs, waters and places invoked by pre-germ theory epidemiologists.

Readers of this journal will have inescapably consulted Hirsch's monumental accumulation of data about the occurrence of illnesses around the globe (1859-64), but few of us will have known much about the

author. Barrett tells about Hirsch's huge intention to draw from his mountain of details laws which, Barrett says, would provide 'a complete theory of historical and geographical pathology and nosology'. Nineteenth-century European statecraft and technology had opened the world's climates, topography and societies to investigation and 'improvement'. But Hirsch's great work ultimately revealed that close causal connections of latitudes with fevers, for example, were not straightforward. This perhaps is the reason, together with his dogged accuracy of citation, why he is still a starting point, while most of his predecessors and contemporaries, some of whom are helpfully discussed in this volume, are forgotten.

Anderson's paper neatly dissects the changing and conflicting debates among landtakers, politicians, anthropologists, medical researchers, and bureaucrats about white Australians' chances in the North. Was it inevitable, as European experience showed in other torrid zones, that whites deteriorated physically and morally in such places, and could they labour efficiently in a future mining and plantation economy, which excluded socially divisive but climatically attuned Asian and Pacific Islander workers? The debate was important; 'tropical' Australia was believed to cover a third of the continent. Geographic determinism worsened an already muddled controversy. As usual, climatic and physiological facts were scarce. Boosters and sceptics could not even agree on which diseases were endemic or which should be tackled first.

Buttimer and Numbers offer expert reflections on the attractions and weaknesses in medical geography. They also rightly praise the editor and his contributors for providing this widely informed survey of a once-powerful doctrine.

F. B. Smith
Australian National University

A Global Scientist: Douglas H. K. Lee. By Malcolm Whyte (Brolga Press, Gundaroo, Qld, 1995) xii, 199pp.

A SURPRISINGLY LARGE NUMBER OF ARTICLES AND BOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN on the history of disease and medicine in Australia—in comparison, say, to California. But these valuable studies can be found mostly in the back numbers of specialist or professional journals; or else they derive from small publishers with poor access to distribution networks. In writing a general history of medical science in Australia, I was recently reminded of the remarkable contribution of Bryan Gandevia to our understanding of disease and health care in this country. But