

Book Reviews

concluded “that if yellow fever was communicable at all by personal contagion it was so only in an extremely feeble degree”. By now, importation by ship was abundantly clear — its further elucidation would await the discovery of mosquito transmission. Buchanan’s sanitary measures on the ship and cargo were similar to those of Melier but, in Britain, dependent on local rather than central government decision. Doubts about their effectiveness, and the always strong British pragmatic regard for commercial considerations in matters of quarantine made their application more difficult at Swansea than at St Nazaire.

Throughout these interesting and worthwhile analyses there are many diversions into the contemporary controversies between contagionists and non-contagionists and their influence on disease control measures. “So seemingly obvious a conclusion provokes a digression . . .” (p. 124) — of at least ten pages! Readers accustomed to the scientific literature may find their patience and persistence tried in tracing the main threads through this labyrinth of digressions.

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ALICK CAMERON (editor). *A surgeon's India. Diaries of Lt. Col. Alexander Cameron, O.B.E., Indian Medical Service*, Tunbridge Wells, Acclaim [for the author], 1986, 8vo, pp. xi, 424, illus., £10.75 + postage.

In the early days of the East India Company, Oxbridge-trained physicians were thought to be too delicate for the rough-and-tumble of medical practice in India. Apprenticed surgeons may not have been gentlemen, but they could cut off a leg as well as breathe a vein, they were expert at treating the pox, and they would turn out for any nearby battle, taking over command of troops when necessary. After a short time in the East, the survivors learned the simple measures needed to sustain the health of soldiers and civilians in hot climates, and became more expert than any physician in the management of tropical diseases. The organization of the Company’s surgeons in the middle of the eighteenth century laid the foundation for the Indian Medical Service, which continued until 1947.

Lt. Col. Cameron’s diaries cover his years in the Indian Medical Service 1905–32; edited by his son, they show a pattern of activity that would be familiar to his eighteenth-century predecessors. On reaching India in 1905, he was at once posted to military duties, only changing to Civil Surgeon as he became more senior. From the first, he was expected to carry out a wide variety of complex operations, as well as dealing with all obstetric and medical conditions. He served all over India, in China, Persia, and in the Great War in East Africa, where the hospital admission rate among troops was 206/thousand/month. As Civil Surgeon he was in charge of the local hospitals, supervised the jails, controlled epidemics of plague, cholera and typhus, and kept up a busy practice, which included many Indians, mostly the nobility. When he attended one high-born lady, the only contact he was allowed with his patient, as John Fryer had found in 1678, was to feel her pulse through a purdah. He had regular language tuition, passing the required examinations, and becoming proficient in five languages. Sport was an essential part of this life: games, riding, hunting, and, in every spare moment, shooting — sometimes for the pot, sometimes to control man-eaters, but mostly for sport. The editor describes the devastating depressive illness that afflicted his father, but nothing of this appears in the diaries, which are a laconic account of his ceaseless activity in the tradition of the Service. If the regular attacks of fever were more severe than usual, he took an extra dose of quinine and continued at work.

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MATS RYDÉN, *The English plant names in The Grete Herball (1526). A contribution to the historical study of English plant-name usage*, (Stockholm Studies in English LXI), Uppsala, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1984, 8vo, pp. 110, [no price stated].

This is the first product of the Swedish study ‘The English plant names in early modern

English herbals and floras', in which *The Grete Herball* of 1526, the second printed herbal in English, is subjected to "systematic analysis". Rydén's book is a philological study of *The Grete Herball*'s 500 English plant names, their frequency of use, provenance, typology, and synonymy (i.e., identity). The purpose of the larger study of which this book is a part is to understand "continuity and discontinuity in plant-name patterning" (p. 7); that is, to determine not so much the history of every single plant name in early-modern English, but to outline changes in groups of names. Rydén's work will be useful to anyone studying medieval or modern plant names as well. He finds a number of first usages in English, provides modern identifications, and gives the reader a good introduction to his subject.

Historians will, even so, find some of the author's assumptions disturbing. The Swedish project removes plant names from their herbal context, omitting from the study animal products, stones, and other non-botanical substances. In doing this, the study becomes ahistorical. We read, for instance, that *The Grete Herball* "is a mixture of facts and fancies, a reflex of both rationalism [empiricism] and irrationalism [superstition], . . . In no respect does it foreshadow the expanding knowledge of botany in the 16th century" (p. 18). The perspective of several centuries will no doubt reveal our own times to be a "mixture of facts and fancies" too, littered with continuities and discontinuities apparent only to future generations. The important fact about early herbals — that, like renaissance anatomies, they served a rather different purpose in society from their modern "counterparts" — is not dealt with in *English plant names*. Despite this limitation, Rydén's work is of much philological interest, and helps supply a shocking gap in English-language scholarship.

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G. C. AINSWORTH, *Introduction to the history of medical and veterinary mycology*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 8vo, pp. xi, 228, illus., £30.00.

The relationship between man and fungi has a long and varied history. In an earlier (1976) history of general mycology Dr Ainsworth (who is a former Director of the Commonwealth Mycological Institute at Kew) traced references to fungi in art and literature back to the Greeks and Romans; as fungi predate man on earth, presumably even early man found, by trial and error, that some fungi were edible, some were poisonous, and some were lethal. Particularly notorious among the latter is *Amanita phalloides*, which has induced apprehension and has caused occasional fatalities among careless mushroom-gatherers over the centuries. Its less poisonous but more decorative cousin *Amanita muscaria*, the fly agaric, has appealed to painters and photographers in recent times. Long before that, Norse warriors found this spectacular toadstool and its toxins useful to accentuate their natural ferocity and terrify their enemies with wild berserker frenzy (in Iceland today, the fly agaric, the only poisonous species among the country's many wild toadstools, is commonly known as the *berserkr* fungus). In appropriate doses the effects of the toxins would last for about three weeks, after which the recipients would return to normal levels of barbarity. More recently, the fly agaric has been in regular use among tribes in north-eastern Siberia to induce intoxication and consequent "uncontrolled excited dancing" on special occasions; and in 1970, John Allegro, in *The sacred mushroom and the cross*, suggested a connexion between cults using the fly agaric for similar purposes and early Christianity.

An equally dramatic type of frenzy results from ergot poisoning. From the early Middle Ages until surprisingly recently (the last English outbreak of note occurred in Manchester in 1927), contamination of staple grain with mycotoxin of *Claviceps purpurea* especially following cold, wet summers caused epidemic outbreaks of ergotism throughout Europe. In its convulsive form it is thought to have been behind the "dancing epidemics" reported until the late-sixteenth century, when the causal relationship with contaminated grain was gradually recognized and replaced the theory of the dancers' possession by the devil. Other mycotoxicoses of man and especially of animals have traditionally been studied in Russia and in Japan; more recently, they