

Book Reviews

ELIZABETH SMITH, *A woman with a purpose. The diaries of Elizabeth Smith 1872–1884*, edited by Veronica Strong-Boag, Toronto and London, University of Toronto Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. xxxviii, 298, illus., \$25.00 (\$10.00 paperback).

The evangelical rationale for feminism and for women practising medicine goes back to the late eighteenth century: evangelism was transmuted into Victorianism. The inspiration for Elizabeth Blackwell's symbolic opening of the allopathic medical profession to women lay in the 1845 suggestion of a dying female friend: "If I could have been treated by a lady doctor, my worst sufferings could have been spared me." By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, middle-class women were successfully challenging the male monopoly of medical education in Europe, North America, and related cultures. Their temporary success was due to the association of their challenge with orthodox, "Victorian" values.

Elizabeth Smith (1859–1949), schoolteacher, medical student (the first half of the diaries describe the former phase, the second the latter), practising physician, medical lecturer, leader in moral reform, and in movements for mental hygiene and mothers' pensions, illustrates this association. She was one of the first three women to graduate from a Canadian medical school, in 1884. On entering the Kingston Medical School, Queens University, Smith and her two fellow female students presciently named themselves Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Before graduating, they had faced a "furnace" of hostile male students capitalizing with "vulgar levity" on the exposure of women to physiology: the same Victorian values justifying women's medical education could be used to reduce it to a segregated, inferior process. Smith gave up her medical career in 1893 to devote herself to marriage, childrearing, and volunteer work. Simply graduation from medical school followed by motherhood had always been her goals. Her diaries testify to both an intense ambition of the kind Smith herself associated with the self-made man *and* to her desire to exemplify Protestant womanhood.

The diary entries published in this version are sixty per cent of the manuscript at the University of Waterloo. According to the editor, Veronica Strong-Boag, the remainder consists of "repetitious passages, many of them devoted to religion and social chit-chat and several of the poems . . .". She divides the text into ten sections and provides a sensible introduction to Smith's life and Canadian women's struggle to enter medicine. Footnotes in the text are sparse and Smith's most intriguing and difficult references and quotations are left unidentified. Nonetheless, these diary extracts are of considerable value to social historians generally, as well as to historians of feminism, education, and medicine.

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INNES H. PEARSE, *The quality of life. The Peckham approach to human ethology*. Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. xvi, 194, illus., £6.50.

Innes Pearse's book is very much a personal reminiscence of the two decades' existence of the pioneer experiment in human ethology, supplementing the previous

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books by herself and her collaborators, G. Scott Williamson and Lucy Crocker, *The case for action* (1931), *Biologists in search of material* (1938), and *The Peckham experiment* (1943). Set up in the 1930s, the Peckham centre housed under one roof an enormous range of social activities for the community, from carpentry and swimming to ante-natal guidance, in the service of two deeper scientific goals. First, the “bionomic” desire amongst the founders to observe the social transactions of families within a wider milieu, seeing how inner impulses and outer opportunities dovetailed to form patterns of achievement activity. As Innes Pearse makes clear, all those families who joined the centre were being continually “watched” (its building was designed, like Bentham’s panopticon, to ensure maximum visibility), and they had to agree to initial and regular “overhauls” and “screenings”. Yet, the ideas behind the centre were far from “authoritarian” (much to the chagrin of orthodox contemporary social workers and administrators). As far as possible the centre was to be self-running, Scott Williamson and Innes Pearse believing that a “biological” order would establish itself, emergent out of the integrative action of the various social organisms making up – not the aggregate but the “whole”.

Second, the belief that social medicine had taken a wrong turning in being pre-occupied with disease, its cure and prevention, rather than with health as a real and positive entity. To the end of promoting health, the Peckham centre provided extensive consultations with families to instruct on topics such as pregnancy and breast feeding, regular health checks (including for couples contemplating marriage), a health farm and health holidays, and healthy environments (e.g. pioneering the use of hammock cots).

Innes Pearse’s recollections and vindication provoke many intriguing questions. One would like to know far more about the intellectual roots of the movement – its precise blend of organicist bio-medical theory, left-wing politics (combining primitivist elements with Fabian tendencies), and philanthropy. The “ethnomethodology” of the encounters between South London working-class families and idealistic young doctors would be good to know about from the other side. And it would be fascinating to have the connexions and parallels brought out between Peckham and other contemporary movements to anthropologize and educate the lower classes in Darkest England: Mass Observation comes to mind. It is time an outsider explored the achievements and ambiguities of the Peckham experiment.

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CHARLES LYTE, *Sir Joseph Banks: eighteenth-century explorer, botanist, and entrepreneur*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1980, 8vo, pp. 248, illus., £10.50.

It is now nearly thirty years since the last complete biography of Banks, and Charles Lyte has many advantages over his predecessor, H. C. Cameron. Impressive research has been done on particular episodes – Banks’s voyage to Newfoundland and Labrador in 1766, for instance, and the kidnapping of Spanish Merinos to breed a royal flock. *The “Endeavour” journal of Joseph Banks 1768–1771* has been published, and by way of a bonus, the author enjoys a new freedom to be explicit about Banks’s