

Book Reviews

central, the author, an internationally-known ethnologist resident in Colombia, has collected his data from three sources: conversation with natives, their accounts being reproduced in translation, and in particular the services of a remarkable Indian who was able to analyse acutely his own people; the author's personal experience when participating in drug-taking ceremonies; from a secondary source, the Spanish chronicles. The uniqueness of the book lies in Reichel-Dolmatoff's intimate knowledge of these primitive peoples, and together with a thorough mastery of their language and customs he has been able to make close rapport with them, thus permitting him to penetrate their culture more effectively than anyone before him.

A number of books of this kind have appeared recently, most of them attempting to understand the drug dependency of primitive peoples, and so, it is hoped, to assist in the comprehension and thus the handling of addiction in Western nations. Dr. Reichel-Dolmatoff, however, is interested primarily in the former and by studying it closely he is able to understand many basic cultural processes. His excellent book is, therefore, an outstanding contribution to social anthropology.

FRED W. VOGET, *A history of ethnology*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975, 8vo, pp. ix, 879, [no price stated].

The author's plan is to trace ". . . the intellectual history of cultural anthropology, with special emphasis on ethnology. . . ." The main strands of this vast subject are followed, and the subject-matter is divided into four historical periods: classical, Renaissance and Arabic; the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which the idea of human development towards a perfect social state became prominent, first in the phase 1725 to 1840 when a humanistic view of human progress predominated, followed by evolutionary theory in the second, 1840 to 1890, with breakthroughs in geology, palaeontology, prehistory and anthropology; 1890 to 1940 with a linking of culture and society, attempts to produce a general theory of each, and with the development of scientific approaches and professionalization; 1940 to the present, characterized by increasing specialization whereby links with economics, political science and psychology have been made so that a more integrated perspective and methodology have resulted. There is a lengthy list of references and a useful glossary. Despite the latter, parts are not easy to read, and although aimed at students the book may be of greater interest to scholars. It certainly should be known to the medical historian, who may benefit considerably from a perusal of parts of it.

PAMELA DIXON, *Ginseng*, London, Duckworth, 1976, 8vo, pp. 101, illus., £3.95 (95p paperback).

For millennia in the East ginseng has maintained the reputation of a universal cure-all, aphrodisiac and prolonger of life. More recently it has become popular in the West. This book describes its history from the earliest use of it to the present day, including an account of modern research. No one seems to know how it acts pharmacologically, but it is now being used widely as a natural tonic and antistress agent, as in fact has been the case in China for centuries.

The root of the plant is used and it often grows into the shape of a man, thus resembling the mandragora of the West both in shape, symbolism and therapeutic use;

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this comparison is not made here but a comparative study of the two drugs would make a most interesting investigation. One is also reminded of *Rauwolfia* from Ancient India which turned out to have a hypotensive action. The author has written a very interesting and useful book, but it is a pity that the documentation is rather limited.

HANS FLÜCK, *Medicinal plants*, translated by J. M. Rowson, London, W. Foulsham, 1976, 8vo, pp. 188, illus., £2.95.

F. MITTON and V. MITTON, *Mitton's practical modern herbal*, London, W. Foulsham, 1976, 8vo, pp. 134, illus., £2.95.

There has of late been a resurgence of interest in "natural" methods of medication by diet and herbs, and no doubt these books are products of it. Each lists herbal remedies and the first describes each plant in turn alphabetically, with information on its appearance, the parts used, habitat and collection, constituents and actions, and usage. It also has a brief section on ailments and their treatment. The second is much the same, but with less information on the herbs themselves, and more errors.

The historian of medicine will be interested in comparing the herbal remedies suggested here with very similar therapy practised millennia ago. Without doubt some of them have pharmacological actions, but it is always dangerous to encourage the layman to treat himself and so obscure or delay the recognition of diseases successfully treatable only by modern means.

OLIVER W. SACKS, *Awakenings*, Harmondsworth, Middx., Penguin Books, 1976, 8vo, pp. 344, illus., £1.00 (paperback).

The author is a neurologist and he describes the victims of encephalitis lethargica who survived this disease fifty years ago and now, through the agency of a new drug L-Dopa, have "awakened". After an introduction he gives a series of twenty extended case histories of his patients, followed by essays on perspectives, awakening, tribulation and accommodation. Throughout, he writes with great sensitivity and subtlety concerning the patient as well as his specific disease, and the accounts of the patients are brilliant depictions.

First published in 1973, the present edition has additional material in the form of footnotes. This includes further clinical observations and reflections which together constitute a third of the book. The basic structure of the book is therefore undisturbed. The first edition was greeted enthusiastically and this one adds to the original qualities. It is a moving contribution to the history of a devastating epidemic, a tragic aftermath, and of a remarkable drug. In addition to Dr. Sacks' concern with a particular disease he also writes shrewdly on disease as a process so that this book will also be of value to historians of other disorders, as well as to clinicians.

RICHARD SAUNDERS, *Poor Richard; the almanacks for the years 1733-1758 . . .*, New York and London, Paddington Press, 1976, 4to, pp. xiii, 300, illus., £7.95.

Of Benjamin Franklin's multifarious publications none was more popular than his classic of American letters, *Poor Richard's almanacks*. In colonial America they had a wide readership, as was also the case in France. They were full of useful information, much like the many other almanacks available then and still published today. The