

Book Reviews

Tom Dummer is an English osteopath who compares Tibetan medicine with such Western alternative systems as Western herbalism, homeopathy, and osteopathy. The first part of the book, however, is taken up by the Buddhist view of the body in relation to the universe, Buddhist cosmology, Tantric physiology, and Buddhist psychological counselling. Here the ancient teachings are evaluated from the modern Western point of view and collated with Western ways, each having their place in the variegated healing dance.

Finally, the history of Tibetan medicine and life of the ninth-century Tibetan physician gYu-thog, out of print in the English version called *Tibetan medicine in original texts*, have now been resuscitated in a French translation which is beautifully and lavishly illustrated.

Marianne Winder, Wellcome Institute

JOHN K. CRELLIN and JANE PHILPOTT, *Herbal medicine past and present*, vol. 1, *Trying to give ease*, 8vo, pp. x, 335, \$35.00, vol. 2, *A reference guide to medicinal plants*, 8vo, pp. 549, illus., \$59.50, \$19.95 (paperback), Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1990.

The authors of these two fat volumes, respectively a medical historian and a botanist, were teaching a medicinal plant course at Duke University when they were invited to evaluate the work of an elderly herbalist with an impressively large practice of some 2,000 people yearly. This was in the uplands of north-east Alabama, an area outstandingly rich botanically and intermediate culturally between the Appalachians and the deep South. Tommie Bass proved to be a gifted narrator with an exceptional memory, and over an eight-year period an enormous mass of information was elicited from him and from others in his local community about the remedies in circulation and the social context in which they were used. The result is a study unique in the range of its probing, which will surely prove of lasting value to anthropologists, medical sociologists, and students of folklife no less than to members of other disciplines with a specialist interest, for one reason or another, in herbs and the how and why of their utilization.

The first volume consists in the main of an exhaustive account of the Bass practice in all its manifold aspects (including self-treatment and popular ideas about disease), accompanied by nearly 50 pages of end-notes and nearly 60 of annotated bibliography. An introductory chapter provides a helpful historical overview of Western phytotherapy since classical times, paying special attention to the respective contributions to herbal lore of empiricism, theoretical concepts and reliance on analogy, the role of sensory properties in the rationalizing of herb reputations, and how far the indigenous North American flora has been exploited for medicinal purposes. In this last connection the authors note the problems inherent in isolating genuinely native (i.e., Amerindian) uses from those derived from the early colonists—problems all too familiar to anyone who has attempted to separate the basic and autochthonous from later, immigrant overlays in other regions of the world. No more than about seventeen remedies, it has been suggested, have been taken into mainstream regular medical use from Amerindian practice, though a good many more have been adopted domestically. At the same time reliance on naturalized European plants has to a surprising degree persisted: Bass was found to be using such age-old British standbys as comfrey, dandelion, elder, ground ivy, and mullein, among others.

The second volume, intended to stand as a work in its own right, is essentially a *catalogue raisonné* of the various herbs known to Bass, with his description of their uses and an editorial commentary in each case placing the plant in question in its wider historical and pharmacological context. With this comes a further annotated bibliography of another 60 pages.

The two together constitute a major milestone of scholarship in a field that for far too long has been deplorably notable for the all-too-general lack of that.

David Allen, Wellcome Institute