

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.

C. E. Gordon Smith

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

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.

T. J. S. Patterson

Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford

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