

Book Reviews

JOSEPH KENNEDY, *Coca Exotica. The illustrated story of cocaine*, London, Associated University Presses, 1985, 4to, pp. 142, illus., £29.95.

A large-format, coffee-table book on the history of cocaine is peculiarly appropriate to modern times. The drug is said to be booming in chic circles yet holds "recurrent bogeyman" status in the more puritan salons. It gets up both sides' noses, so to speak. And this dichotomy seems to have informed Kennedy's work; his labour of love lacks the detail of serious history yet misses the effervescence required by lighter minds.

But inside a mistaken formula—why is the large format wasted by a predominance of quarter-page illustrations?—there seems to be a good book straining to get out. The pre-Columbian details, based on archaeological research, are lovingly portrayed, not least by the heart-rending cover illustration of an Inca boy, frozen to death in a mountain-top sacrifice. The surprisingly numerous references in Early Modern European literature, the heyday of nineteenth-century usage in every possible form (Vin Mariani, Delicious Dopeless Koca Nola, Coca-Cola the "intellectual beverage"), Dr Freud's notorious involvement, and the slide, via the 1912 Hague Opium Convention, towards "botanical imperialism", are nicely highlighted and a good example of the desperate need for a historical analysis of current drug habits and attitudes.

It is when the good archaeologist—the author's apparent calling—has to bow to publishing pressures that interest falters. The Andes are "mighty", the 1890s were "a time of intense creativity", the 1960s "a time of revolt, dissent and re-evaluation". Many of the later sources are secondary. Psychiatric writings on "Cocainism" (e.g. Kraepelin's) are largely ignored. The rather hesitant style seems flattened by the need to expound a complex thesis. Without the gritty details of a fuller history, the conclusions seem vague rather than balanced, non-committal rather than critical.

Yet from this somewhat stolid presentation several interesting questions emerge. To what extent is drug *abuse* related to a drug's purification (cocaine from coca, heroin from opium) and industrialization? Was the discovery of amphetamine the cause of cocaine's decline in the 1930s and 1940s? Why, now, is caffeine O.K. yet coca not? There is a rich line of historical research in the cocaine story, and this work is really only an introduction. Even so, any American declaring that "profit motive and health care are often a bad mix" deserves at least two cheers.

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G. G. MEYNELL, *The two Sydenham Societies. A history and bibliography of the medical classics published by the Sydenham Society and the New Sydenham Society (1844–1911)*, Acrise, Kent, Winterdown Books, 1985, 4to, pp.viii, 192, illus. £13.00 (paperback).

The aim of this scholarly little publication is both to reconstruct the history of the Sydenham Society (1844–57) and its successor, the New Sydenham Society (1858–1911) from surviving annual reports, and to provide librarians and bibliophiles with an accurate bibliography of the 236 volumes issued by the two societies. (The bibliography is complicated by the societies' practice of issuing books *for* a specified year, though not necessarily *in* that year.) Modelled on the historical printing societies that proliferated in the 1830s, the Sydenham Society initially had no difficulty in acquiring ten per cent of the medical profession as subscribers. Like the chemists' Cavendish Society (1846–72), however, subscribers fell away rapidly because of disparity between its Council's interests and book choices and those of the membership. The first society was dissolved in 1857 and a new, more democratic bookclub begun under the able secretaryship of Jonathan Hutchinson. Both societies were, and remain, important for the large quantity of translations of European medical works that they published. All medical libraries with partial or complete holdings of the Sydenham series should acquire Dr Meynell's meticulous study, which could also be used to probe the uptake of continental research by British doctors during the Victorian period.

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