

## BOOK REVIEW

**The Seven Sisters of Sleep.** Mordecai C. Cooke. Lincoln, MA: Quarterman Publications, Inc. (P.O. Box 156, Lincoln, MA 01773), 1989 (reproduction of original 1860 edition). Pp. xi, 371. \$45.00 (clothbound). ISBN 0-88000-146-1.

Mordecai Cubitt Cooke's first book, *The Seven Sisters of Sleep*, originally published in 1860, is one of the rarest classics of the psychoactive drug literature, with only a few copies known to exist in U.S. libraries (Cooke 1860). The third book to survey the topic and the second in English, published just five years after *The Chemistry of Common Life* (Johnston 1855) and *Die Narkotischen Genussmittel und der Mensch* (Bibra 1855), *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* is now available in a facsimile edition of 1000 copies. The book is well bound, and features a foreword by Richard Evans Schultes and Michael R. Aldrich, which places it in historical context. The book lacks a bibliography or index. There is a frontispiece photograph of the author as an elderly man, and six line drawings in the text of traditional tobacco and *betel* paraphernalia. Quarterman is to be commended for publishing this rare book, which will be followed by an English translation of von Bibra's 1855 classic.

The "seven sisters" of the title are the seven "narcotic" or psychoactive plants discussed in the book—tobacco (*Nicotiana* spp.), opium (*Papaver somniferum* L.), hemp or marijuana (*Cannabis* spp.), *betel* (*Areca catechu* L.), *coca* (*Erythroxylum* spp.), thornapple (*Datura* spp.) and "the exile of Siberia," the fly-agaric (*Amanita muscaria* L. ex Fr.) (Pers. ex Gray). In his opening chapter, Cooke introduces his seven drugs with a charming legend of the "Seven Sisters of Sleep" he invented for the occasion, and in the following chapter he surveys some references to inebriants in the ancient world. There follow six chapters, making up about a fourth of the book, on that "wond'rous weed" tobacco. After covering the history and ethnobotany of tobacco, Cooke discourses on "pipeology," the history of tobacco pipes, then devotes individual chapters to tobacco snuffing (in which he mentions *niopo*, entheogenic *Anadenanthera* snuff from the Orinoco) and tobacco chewing. A brief chapter on tobacco substitutes leads into six chapters on opium, covering natural history, ethnopharmacology, and effects, both positive ("Revels and Reveries") and negative ("Pandemonium"). There is a Victorian chapter on "Opium Morals" and a chapter on opium substitutes. Three chapters on hemp deal with its history, effects, and ethnopharmacology, followed by three chapters of similar information regarding *betel*. *Coca* ("Our Lady of Yongas"), "*Datura* and Co." and *Amanita muscaria* are each covered in a single chapter, and there are two chapters on inorganic drugs, the first on the alimentary and medicinal use of "Whitewash and Clay," the second on medicinal use of "Precious Metals," in this case the not-so-precious arsenic and mercury. A final chapter, in which the author goes about "gathering the crumbs," concludes with an *apologia* for the tobacco habit, and the fabled angel of sleep tenderly embraces the angel of death as the curtain closes; to an encore Appendix of 19 tables.

This quaint and witty book is well written and provides an entertaining introduction to the subject for the nonspecialist. Cooke's florid and whimsical style will delight the lover of Victorian literature. The book presents solid, though dated information on the "seven sisters," and mentions many other, lesser-known inebriating plants. Although this wonderful book has been a lost classic for the past century, it has had a lasting impact on our culture. *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* is widely regarded to have inspired Lewis Carroll in the writing of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—especially the scene of the hookah-smoking caterpillar sitting on a mushroom which could make Alice grow larger or smaller, just as Cooke's "Exile of Siberia" was said to give "erroneous impressions of size and distance"—

a straw lying in the road becomes a formidable object, to overcome which, a leap is taken sufficient to clear a barrel of ale ...

#### LITERATURE CITED

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