

at the expense of the two major cities. Notley seems to have persistently underestimated the party's prospects in Edmonton, a city of which he was not particularly fond, and in 1969 and 1971 he rejected opportunities to run there in ridings where he had a good chance of winning. Instead he chose the remote riding of Spirit River-Fairview, which he represented (and in which he resided) from 1971 until his death. (He was on his way there when an airplane accident ended his life.) Not until 1982 did the party win a second seat (in Edmonton) and it was only after Notley's death that it won most of the Edmonton ridings and a few in Calgary besides: Nonetheless, it is almost certain that this would have happened even if Notley had still been leader. Declining energy prices, Lougheed's retirement, and the fatal handicap of sharing a party label with the unpopular Mulroney government would have weakened the Tories' hold on urban Alberta in any event, and memories of Trudeau were still too fresh for the Liberals to profit from that fact in 1986.

Leeson, as an honest biographer, does not evade the urban versus rural issue. Despite his affection for Notley, he accuses him of bad judgement for failing to run in the Edmonton riding vacated by E.C. Manning in 1969. Elsewhere in the book he shows similar honesty, blaming Notley for the party's "financial mess" in 1962 and describing Notley's report on the 1963 federal election campaign (such as it was) as "self-serving hearsay." Notley's ruthlessness towards his predecessor, Neil Reimer, his lack of cultural or other nonpolitical interests, and his rather old-fashioned views on male and female roles in marriage are also discussed in a forthright manner. On the other hand, Notley's virtues are also emphasized: almost awesome integrity, devotion to thrift and the work ethic, singleness of purpose, and a total absence of personal spite or fanaticism.

Was Notley really, as the subtitle suggests, the social conscience of Alberta? In the last few years of his life he was, but Leeson inexcusably neglects the opportunity to prove that he was by dismissing those last years in a few pages. The earlier years, when Notley was more preoccupied with the party's internal machinations than with its role as a vehicle of social change and reform, are treated with much greater detail. Readers who do not remember Notley in his last years may thus consider the subtitle rather unconvincing. Those who do remember may be frustrated by the way the biography tapers off to its brutally abrupt ending. However, anyone interested in Alberta politics, or in Canadian political parties more generally, will find this book informative, interesting, and readable.

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Medicinal Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide, by Kelly Kindscher. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1992. Pp. 340.

While putting together his earlier publication, *Edible Wild Plants of the*

Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide, Kelly Kindscher turned up important information on aboriginal medical uses of native plants — hence this second book. It is, the author says, the first study of the medicinal plants (surely not all!) of the entire prairie bioregion, covering the short-grass, mixed-grass and tall-grass belts from the north-south Alberta-Texas axis on the west to the prairie peninsula east of Lake Michigan. The reader is warned at the beginning that the book “is not an herbal or medical guide to the use of native plants for self-healing... and should not be read as promoting experimental use by individuals... (it) contains descriptions, not prescriptions” which means that much of the Native information is not evaluated. Nor could it be, as Kindscher points out, by one brought up outside the Native cultures.

The goal of the book is to promote a greater understanding of prairie plants and their uses, and commendably to encourage the conservation, protection, and reestablishment of prairie plants and prairies throughout the region. From historical and ethnobotanical reports the author has summarized prairie-plant medicinal uses by the twenty-five main Indian tribes of the grassland bioregion. Of the selected 203 species described or mentioned in the text aboriginals used 172. The others are included because settlers found them helpful for various ills — doubtless a migratory carry-over from the ancient herbal wisdom of Europe. Significantly, all the prairie plants adopted for use by Anglo medical practitioners had been used previously by the Native people.

The book is divided into two sections, the first treating forty-three plants that have had the widest use and the second describing, in shorter form, sixty others and their relatives. Those in the first category are illustrated with excellent line drawings and detailed descriptions. The initial entry, Yarrow or *Archillea millefolium*, will serve as an example. Under separate headings the following information is set out on five pages: the thirteen common English names; the names and translated meanings of epithets conferred by the Cheyenne, the Osage, the Lakota, the Winnebago (for example, for the latter, “hank-sintsh” meaning “woodchuck tail”); the scientific name and its derivation (*Achillea*, referring to the Greek hero Achilles who with this plant healed a soldier’s wounds); a botanical description; the plant’s habitat with a range map that shows its distribution in the United States; the parts of the plant used (especially flowers and leaves); the Indian usage (most commonly to treat coughing and throat irritations and to stop bleeding); the Anglo folk usage (for example, put in the nose to cause bleeding and ease the pain of migraine); the medical history (used for hemorrhoids, dysentery, hemoptysis, menstrual afflictions, wounds, hypochondria and cancer); scientific research (that is, attempts to isolate active chemical constituents); and finally, harvesting and cultivation. Incidentally, a European herbalist reports archaeological evidence that Neanderthals were using Yarrow medicinally 60,000 years ago in Iraq.

Drawing on more than 250 bibliographic references, Kindscher has packed his book with information. Much of it is nonessential — such as the

plant descriptions, scientific names, and habitats that are more adequately described in the numerous "floras" of the region — but a great deal is fascinating. Consider the Dakotas' belief (similar to that of the Aborigines of Australia) that "each species has its own particular song which is the expression of its life or soul," and the evidence on many pages of the vitality on both sides of the Atlantic of the Doctrine of Signatures: that the plants themselves reveal their human uses — for example, plants with milky juice are good for nursing mothers.

A striking aspect of herbal medicine as practiced by the Plains Indians and indeed worldwide is that few plants, if any, were considered specific to just one sickness. Most were used for a broad spectrum of ills, as the earlier example of Yarrow shows. The Sioux explained to Kindscher that the plants they use are not selected because they contain medicinal substances but for spiritual healing. They believe that the spirit heals rather than the plant. Our culture looks for magic bullets, for active chemicals, to zap germs or cell disorders. This explains why, again and again, one reads that a certain plant was officially listed in the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia* or in the *National Formulary* but was withdrawn in the late 1800s or early 1900s when research failed to isolate specific active chemicals. To the European way of thinking herbal medicine is quaint and only chemotherapy is scientific. The two cultures cannot communicate.

For Canadian readers, the geographic ranges of three-quarters of the major species and two-thirds of the minor species extend into the prairie provinces and so the book is useful north of the 49th parallel. The introductory map of the prairie bioregion does not do justice to Saskatchewan and Alberta, the latter assigned only a small prairie patch in the southeast corner. Apparently Canadian "floras" were not consulted in drafting the range maps and many species shown as reaching their northern limits in the United States are plentiful much farther north.

Returning to the book's beginning, the author expresses the hope that by highlighting the history, ecology, and pharmacology of medicinal prairie plants he can "contribute to making this information part of the current folklore of these plants and help *establish their value as a potential source of future medicines.*" Again, "this knowledge gives us a reason to safeguard this relationship." Are we fated always and forever to justify preservation of the natural world by reference to human utility?

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Beyond the Social Gospel: Church Protest on the Prairies, by Ben Smillie. Saskatoon: The United Church Publishing House and Fifth House Publishers, 1991. Pp. 170.

In late 1989 government forces in El Salvador murdered six Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter at the Central American University. Father Jon Sobrino shared the house and mission of those who died but survived