

Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain. By James Gregory. (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007, xii plus 313 pp., £57.50).

James Gregory has written a thoroughly professional, wide-ranging analysis of a numerically small but politically and culturally significant group of campaigning Victorian exponents of what might now be called 'lifestyle politics'. He maps the growth, decline and recovery of Victorian vegetarianism in Britain from the 1830s (the Vegetarian Society was founded in 1847) to the early twentieth century, charting geographical spread (with enduring rivalries between Manchester and district and the metropolis, and intriguing intermittent outposts like Padstow in Cornwall), social structure (predominantly middle to lower middle class and black-coated worker), gender composition (predominantly masculine, as befitted contemporary expectations about the private and public sphere, but with a strong leavening of female activists and a separate but not disconnected female society), and modes of representation (mainly in contemporary periodicals). Full use is made of the extensive vegetarian press, and the research is apparently exhaustive, with a great deal of revealing detail on display and 119 of the 313 pages of text taken up with footnotes, a full scholarly bibliography and an index. Among the details divulged along the way is the information that Sir Charles Isham, who combined his interest in vegetarianism with support for homeopathy, spiritualism and mesmerism, was responsible for introducing garden gnomes into Britain. Many similar nuggets are vouchsafed to the diligent reader.

Isham's multiple interests were characteristic of many vegetarians, and Gregory draws out the links and connections very effectively without making too much of them. He examines relationships, whether mutually supportive, antagonistic or indifferent, between vegetarianism and strands within radical politics, socialism, the Co-operative movement, various brands of religious non-conformity, secularism, and a panoply of alternative and esoteric belief systems and communitarian ventures, on a spectrum from 'respectable radicals' to bohemians. Problems arising from literal interpretations of biblical texts on proper dietaries provide an interesting sub-text. Gregory's book links up with the literature on (for example) secularism, spiritualism, dress reform, birth control, the 'simple life', sexuality and theosophy (he has also written on Victorian 'eccentricity'), as well as connecting with more prosaic debates on diet and living standards in Victorian England, and prompting speculation on the psychology of 'faddists' and health reformers as personality types, and their relationship with broader reforming political cultures. Few stones are left unturned: Matthew Hilton on smoking and Owen Davies on astrologers and the survival of 'magic' are rare omissions from the wider frame of reference. The material is spread thinly sometimes, largely because there were so few vegetarians and so many sub-divisions among them, but Gregory makes the most of what there is. Occasionally he loses control of grammar and sentence structure, and footnotes sometimes drop off the end of paragraphs, while it is unfortunate that one of the rare spelling errors affects a citation of a work by the present reviewer. Tuxford is

in Nottinghamshire, not Northamptonshire (p. 56), and Gregory's grip on local circumstances might at times be tighter. Local case-studies of vegetarianism as part of broader radical cultures in places like Bolton and Sheffield might have enriched the argument. These errors and (perhaps) missed opportunities are, at worst, minor blemishes.

A peculiarity of the book is Gregory's use of 'zoophilia' as an academic synonym for the expression of principled concern about animal welfare, with a chapter heading 'Beasts and Saints: Zoophilia and Religion in the Movement', and sub-sections headed 'Vegetarian Zoophilia' and 'The Relationship with Mainstream Zoophile Organizations'. This runs counter, with potentially embarrassing consequences, to what seems to be the dominant current usage, which equates the term with sexual as well as emotional relationships between people and animals in ways that overlap with 'bestiality'. However much Victorian vegetarians might have gloried in being distinctive and different, such an identification would certainly have taken them several bridges too far, as the actual discussion of the relationships between organized vegetarianism and the movement against cruelty to animals makes abundantly clear. It is surprisingly inconclusive, with the strongest links between vegetarianism and other reform movements operating in other directions; but the discussion constitutes a further dimension to a consistently aware and outward-looking book. Let us be clear, in general, that this is a very thorough, thoughtful, well-informed piece of research, offering depth and context to the careful reader, and reaching out to illuminate a wide range of cognate Victorian themes. It deserves to be widely read and cited.

Leeds Metropolitan University

John K. Walton

Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History. By Rod Edmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. ix plus 255 pp.).

In his Introduction to *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History*, Rod Edmond, Professor of Modern Literature and Cultural History at the University of Kent explains that he is not a "historian of medicine, but a literary-cum-postcolonial critic of strongly historicist bent." His study of the modern history of leprosy¹ is situated in the "new imperial history" which seeks to show how metropole and colony were "mutually constitutive" [p. 17]. What follows is a series of chapters which, in varied ways, explore how responses to leprosy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may illuminate important aspects of imperialism in the colonies as well as how the colonial experience fostered—or rekindled—concerns of contamination, contagion, infection and degeneration within the metropolitan powers themselves.

Edmond argues that despite the now known fact that leprosy is not a readily communicable infection, it has long been so stigmatized in Judeo-Christian cultures because "the leprous body challenges the fundamental distinction between life and death, putrefying and decomposing while alive and still able to reproduce" [p. 3]. In the Western European Middle Ages, lepers were stigmatized, banished and on occasion persecuted. Leprosy however appears to have been less

Copyright of Journal of Social History is the property of George Mason University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.