Clarion Review

Health & Fitness

Farmacist Desk Reference: Encyclopedia of Whole Foods Medicine
Don Tolman
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Three Stars (out of Five)

There is a long American tradition of eccentric health-conscious iconclasts from John Harvey Kellogg to Dr. Bronner and Adelle Davis. Like them Don Tolman a health lecturer author and researcher combines erudition a passion for healthy food and a sharp disdain for the conventional medical establishment not to mention the pharmaceutical industry.

This massive two-volume work is ambitious expansive and somewhat overwhelming: the text—all 1571 pages of it—is illustrated with hundreds of photographs and images that add visual interest but are sometimes incongruent or distracting. In Volume I topics proceed without a readily discernable order. Eccentrically arranged and loaded with tangential asides it is fairly daunting to attempt reading through the material systematically. More accessible is the material in Volume II "Foods & Symptoms" which proceeds alphabetically by chapter: A for instance includes Anise Alcoholism Alkalosis Allspice Apples and Anger. One can thus hope to find Fasting and Flour under F (the former is the latter is not) but an index would have been a helpful addition for efficient reference use. Once Anise for example is located however one finds two pages of history cultivation and medicinal properties and this same thoroughness can be found in entries for hundreds of other foods and conditions.

The author ranges far afield from the subject of whole foods in Volume I covering various esoteric topics including dream work Celtic tree astrology quartz crystals breatharianism and something called PE2X "A Human Mental Software Infusion for Personal Success." He also writes at length about drug companies which he refers to as "Drug Lords" accusing them of "deliberately [using] their market strategies to…sell sickness and disease." He supports his accusations with some previously published excerpts and mentions some studies but there are no full citations and no bibliography or footnoting to reference his source material. This does not serve his controversial views well: "…white distilled vinegar is made from…crude oil." "Every

year more and more people cause themselves to get cancer than ever before." "Pharma means 'poison.'" Statements as dubious as these cause the author to sound less like a free thinker than a zealot which is a pity when there is such a wealth of good information to be had here as well particularly regarding foods and natural health remedies.

Nevertheless any given page may include interesting anecdotes arresting images or practical advice for living a healthier life. The work is timely as the American population appears increasingly willing to hear about eating unadulterated whole foods and alternative health strategies. Tolman offers this advice for responding to his ideas: "The first question we should ask is: Does this point of view fit common sense? And secondly does it produce results that I desire?" This seems a reasonable way to approach his work which offers a cornucopia of material relating to the physiological political and spiritual aspects of food and alternative health.

Laurie Sullivan