Dreams and destinations

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The African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) owns a doll's house. Seek it out and look carefully at the mural in the nursery. Three figures sit under the shadow of Kilimanjaro sipping whisky. They are Archibald MacIndoe, Tom Rees, and Michael Wood, conspiring together to bring plastic surgery to Africa.

Shining light

Many would have dreamt the dream, considered the problem, and retired to cultivate their garden. Michael Wood went on to become one of the founders of the Kilimanjaro Medical Centre, that splendid hospital with a reputation way beyond its enormous catchment area. He was its first equipment officer and for many years the visiting plastic surgeon. And how did he visit? As anyone with African experience will know, once outside the main centres roads, when passable at all, are veritable vehicle wreckers. So he took to the air, initiated the Flying Doctor service, and became its first pilot. Not content, as many might reasonably have been, with

that achievement, he founded AMREF, and this splendid organisation, with its service commitment, especially to general and reconstructive surgery, its educational books, and its research programme, is one of the shining lights in the ever changing fortunes of East Africa. It has, indeed, revolutionised primary health care in an area extending from Mozambique to the southern Sudan and from Burundi to the sea. When Michael Wood relinquished the director generalship of AMREF then, surely, he could sit back for a life of quiet contemplation under the shadow of his beloved Kilimanjaro. He didn't. He started FARM, the Food and Agricultural Research Mission, with the laudable ambition of turning Africa "green."

All this is told with great simplicity and modesty in his beautiful book, *Different Drums*. He has been marvellously served by his photographer, David Coleman, who, from his deep knowledge and love of Africa together with his technical skill, has captured the very essence of the country and its many peoples. Sir Michael (he was knighted in 1985) was a realist, and his prose is mercifully free from "van der Posting." His affection for his African neighbours is

Some of Henry VIII's actions had more after effects than you might suppose. His dissolution of the monasteries, for instance, meant that for centuries the art of making encaustic tiles was lost. Plain red tiles with an inlay of white clay showing designs of religious scenes or symbolic pictures of animals, birds, and fishes had long been used as floor coverings in cathedrals and religious houses; but nobody made them after the brothers got their marching orders until the art was rediscovered by Samuel Wright and Herbert Minton in the 1830s. With new and advanced techniques the Victorian era saw the flowering of tile making, which became a major industry as well as an art. At the same time there was a great public health drive to reduce infection in hospitals and public buildings, and the easily cleaned surfaces of glazed tiles made them much in demand for such places.

Serving the double purpose of cleanliness and decorative-ness, tile pictures became especially popular for cheering up children's wards, where anxious and lonely children often spent much longer than they do today. Money for tiling schemes was donated to hospitals by rich benefactors or raised by public subscription. Unfortunately some magnificent tile pictures have been destroyed or covered up in recent years, so a book that aims at encouraging their appreciation and preservation is very welcome, especially when it is as well produced and informative as *Brightening the Long Days: Hospital Tile Pictures* by John Greene (£10+£1 post and packing. Published by the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society and obtainable from 18 Welland Court, Cheltenham GL52 3HS, or £12.50 from booksellers. ISBN 0-9512111-0-2). A retired chief nursing officer, John Greene has spent the past four years travelling the United Kingdom recording the still extant tile pictures in more than 70 hospitals; he also gathered valuable information from contemporary sources, the memories of people who had worked in the tile industry, and from children who had seen the project featured on BBC television's *Blue Peter* programme. Fully illustrated, the book makes a good advocate for John

St Swithun's Day,
if thou dost rain
For forty days
it will remain.

St Swithun's day. Tile by Margaret E Thompson made by Doulton for the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Greene's plea for architects and designers to "reintroduce the concept of colour and decoration into the austere interiors of our new hospitals. The therapeutic effect of imaginative decor is just as important now as it was a century ago."

obviously very deep, but he does not shirk the fact that much of tribal life is violent and cruel, or the frustrations suffered by the farmer living next to a people who have scant interest in, or consideration for, the ways of others and will unconcernedly drive their cattle over a newly ploughed field. Above all he combined the qualities of the man of action with those of the thinker, and I suspect that future years will see his international reputation grow. When many were planning the construction of large city hospitals he realised the need to bring help to the people wherever possible, for those rooted in the community undoubtedly do better when they retain the support of family and friends, who bring hope to the sick and great consolation to the dying—and how is a man to be brought home to join the spirits of his ancestors if he dies on the other side of the country? He was sympathetic towards the traditional healers and recognised the potential benefits of cooperation between the two systems, and AMREF's research into herbal medicines may well result in a cheap, locally based, and therefore acceptable pharmacopoeia. (Western medicines are eagerly sought, and as readily discarded if they fail to heal with the first "pilli.")

A voice for others

It is difficult not to feel Michael Wood's recent death as a tragedy, and it would have been a very great one had he not left such a legacy behind. He was fortunate in his family, his wife a daughter of the mission with roots deep in the continent, a brother now directing AMREF, and children deeply concerned in his projects as ophthalmic surgeon and farmers.

So much emphasis is now laid on conformity, the importance of deciding a goal and pursuing it undeviatingly, that there is little place for the man or woman who, perhaps in the immense silence of the African landscape, has heard a different drummer. Michael Wood has spoken for them all, research workers on the edge of the desert, nurses in remote clinics, doctors serving long years in rural

Traditional healer listening for a spirit in a gourd.

hospitals. Perhaps also for those who can give only a couple of years or so out of their professional life to further the work he gave his life to.

Different Drums. Reflections on a Changing Africa. M Wood. (Pp 224; colour plates; £15.95.) London: Century, 1987. ISBN 0-7126-1480-X.

St John's Wort. An illustration from *Health from God's Garden* by Maria Treben (£5.99. Wellingborough: Thorsons, 1987. ISBN 0-7225-1476-X). Simply being near a flowering St John's Wort plant is enough to promote healing, according to Paracelsus, who advised his patients to place some under their nightcaps and beneath their pillows. St John's Wort oil, made from the blossoms and buds, is recommended by modern herbalists for—among other things—back pain, bruises, and rheumatism; and St John's Wort tea for depression and insomnia. The variety of possible uses of this and other plants is enormous, and Maria Treben, a leading authority on medicinal herbs, lists them all, as well as providing botanical descriptions and recipes for their preparation and instructions for their use. She states firmly that she never advises people to ignore their doctors and that they must tell their doctors if they are using herbal remedies. She also has a charitable comment on scientific closed minds: "...not ill will, it is simply that they are not willing to be open to anything which they do not understand; even the most self-evident healing successes are not enough to convince them so long as they are unable to explain why herbs work. In a way, I am in the same position as them—I know the herbs work and how to use them effectively, but I do not know why they work. The difference is that I am perfectly happy to accept these gifts of God without knowing the whys and hows."