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Review of *Gentle Conquest: The Botanical Discovery of North America with Illustrations from the Library of Congress* by James L. Reveal

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Gentle Conquest: The Botanical Discovery of North America with Illustrations from the Library of Congress. James L. Reveal. Washington, DC: Starwood Publishing, 1992. 160 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$39.95.

The main feature of *Gentle Conquest* is the abundance of beautiful illustrations of plants from the collection of the Library of Congress. Around these pictures James L. Reveal has spun a nice, brief account of the naturalists who collected these plants. There are 135 illustrations and pictures, eighty-four in color, forty-three are full page, and most are paintings of plants.

Contrary to the title, the narrative is confined largely to what becomes the United States. The approach is primarily "American frontier": thus the first four chapters cover the period of European colonization, a chapter each on the 1500s and 1600s and two on the 1700s. The featured naturalists are Acosta, John Bannister, Mark Catesby, John Clayton, Alexander Garden, John Bartram, and Linnaeus. The fifth chapter concerns the early explorations into the American West with highlights of the Lewis and Clark adventure and the work of the Michauxs and Thomas Nuttall. The next two chap-

ters describe the European discovery of the botany of the Pacific coast and Hawaii with David Douglas the central figure. The final two chapters fill in and "close" the botanical frontier. Here the focus is on the botanists and collectors who worked with the many western expeditions and surveys of Long, Wilkes, and Fremont.

The narrative strings together short biographical accounts within the chronological framework as described above. The perspective is mainly British after the early emphasis upon such writers as Oviedo, Acosta, and the herbalists. Even with Linnaeus the focus is primarily on British America. This perspective is certainly in line with most research published on American natural history and in line with the author's interest in the plant specimens that ended up in English and northern European herbaria. The emphasis upon finding new species and the naturalists who found them or classified them, provides the connection between the author's story and the numerous illustrations.

For the historian of botany there is little new in the narrative, but for those who have not read the many excellent studies of these early naturalists and botanists and their expeditions and surveys, will find this a good introduction. Intended for a general audience, the book has no footnotes and only a brief bibliography of secondary books. Yet within these restrictions the author brings a knowledge of plants and, particularly in the early chapters, insights based upon his study of the original specimens in European herbaria that make much of his account more than just a summary of the secondary literature. Regardless of the usefulness of the narrative to individual readers, everyone can enjoy the art and beauty of the plants illustrated here. **Richard A. Overfield**, *Department of History, University of Nebraska at Omaha*.