

Lear's Victorian translation of the spiritual letters, and therefore to be preferred by any reader who wants a portrait of Fénelon as a whole, and set against the background of his age.

The actual organization of the material (one wonders if this includes the grouping of the letters into their six logically arranged sections?) and the editing, including most of the footnotes, was done by Professor J. C. Reid of the University of Auckland. This difficult task has been well done on the whole, but there are quite a few gaps where the non-historian would have liked a little more editorial help. Battles and sieges and for-

gotten personalities are conscientiously listed, but nowhere is it said what the long war in question was all about, that it was, in fact the War of the Spanish Succession, and how adversely it affected Archbishop Fénelon's diocese, indeed the whole economy of the French state. This book is a most pleasing production, a fitting memorial both to Fénelon and to his translator. It should stimulate further interest in the rich variety of Fénelon's literary and spiritual writings which, unlike his letters, are as good as unknown in England.

Elisabeth Stopp

THE AGE OF CONSENT by Ann Stafford, *Hodder and Stoughton 30s.*

FEMINISM AND FAMILY PLANNING IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND by J. A. and Olive Banks, *Liverpool University Press 25s.*

Miss Ann Stafford has shown a sound sense of history in devoting more than half of her absorbing book to the complicated story of the Victorian movements which led up to the raising of the age of consent from 13 to 16, before she deals with the famous trial in 1885 of W. T. Stead for the abduction of Eliza Armstrong. Seen in their setting, this trial, together with Mrs Josephine Butler's prolonged campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts 1867, the Salvation Army's pioneer work for the reclamation of prostitutes and Stead's use of popular journalism for the exposure of social evils, were not isolated and trivial episodes but highly significant contributions to the building of a civilization aiming at social justice. All these movements took inspiration from profound Christian belief, but had only indirect association with the new demand for conceding rights to women. Their distinguishing feature was the demand for exceptional courage in exploring squalid subjects then under a rigid

taboo. People who are critical today of the uninhibited public discussion of moral problems may profitably contemplate the horrific results of a policy of silence!

In the course of their respective campaigns, Mrs Butler and the Salvation Army workers had both come across alarming evidence of two unrecognized scandals: firstly, the traffic in young English girls who were induced to enter tolerated brothels in France and Belgium and found themselves unable to escape, secondly the fact that existing English law gave no protection to girls over 13 entrapped into leading an immoral life. Even their parents might find it impossible to reclaim these doomed children and the police could do almost nothing. It was actually a leading police official who told the sceptical Stead: 'It should raise hell, but it does not even raise the neighbours'. The journalist, emotional, headstrong, ambitious, but passionately concerned with human suffering, resolved to raise both hell and

the neighbours.

Miss Stafford's merits as a narrator and student of social history are such that one is reluctant to record that in her account of what followed she is strangely naïve in many of her comments. She asks the right questions but her answers are *jejeune*. There can be little dispute that Stead's plan for 'buying' a girl of 13 from her parents for allegedly immoral purposes and then publishing the story in his *Pall Mall Gazette* was a brilliant, courageous and justifiable piece of strategy. It might even be urged that the employment of an agent as venal – and reluctant – as poor Rebecca Jarrett was unavoidable. But why did Stead, having made his point by enticing Eliza away from the mother into dubious company, then subject her to two administrations of chloroform and three intimate medical examinations? Why did he complicate matters by sending her abroad, failing to inform the police of her whereabouts, and even suppressing her correspondence with her mother? Why did his worthy allies, Mrs Butler and the Booths, fail to make any coherent plans for the child or even for communicating with one another? Stead has now so much sympathy that it should be emphasized that his behaviour was so demented, on Miss Stafford's own showing, that a prosecution was inevitable, and that the Court far from showing prejudice might have acted more severely than it did.

Rarely did the traditional British policy of 'muddling through' show higher dividends than in this remarkable case. The philanthropists learned useful lessons about method, the public, having realized the iniquities they had been tolerating, repented wholeheartedly; the age of consent was promptly raised to 16, and the law

was sternly enforced. From being one of the worst countries in Europe for the protection of young girls, it became one of the best. In the last chapter, Miss Stafford aptly reminds us that the original campaigns 'showed the power of the Christian leaven in a society which, though its hypocrisy masked much vice, much greed, much cruelty, yet acknowledged the standard of Christian morals' (p. 243). There would be little hope that the protection of the young could be maintained if such standards were allowed to perish.

In a more conventionally academic, but unfortunately much less readable essay J. A. and Olive Banks, of the University of Liverpool, have sought to analyse the connection between the growth of feminism and the desire for smaller families. A great many cherished beliefs of the anti-feminists have to be abandoned in the light of their meticulous survey of Victorian documents. The pioneers for education, the ardent campaigners for the extension of the franchise, did not in fact show any special resentment against large families, and were, moreover, anxious not to be allied with a movement as morally suspect as neo-Malthusianism, any more than they were anxious to be allied with Mrs Butler's campaign. All the evidence points to the initiative in the matter being taken by the man in a society largely dominated by masculine values. The authors suggest very plausibly that this principle holds true today and may well mainly account for the failure of the large-scale plans for reduction of the population in Japan and India. Their points are well worth further discussion in an extremely difficult controversy.

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