

rising and falling with the importance of his town, and the importance of the town largely determined by fluctuating trade routes.

These are three examples chosen from among many. Yet it would be grossly unjust to concentrate on such criticisms. So many of the assumptions challenged by Professor Barraclough have long needed to be challenged even if his counter-assertions seem at times too sweeping. And the volume contains sections like that on the medieval empire which could have been written by no other historian in England.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE BISHOP WITH 150 WIVES. By F. X. Gsell. (Angus Robertson; 12s. 6d.)

The startling title—in yellow letters on a purple ground—instantly captures the eye and the imagination. Can the book live up to our startled expectations? The sub-title discloses that it is the account of fifty years as a missionary. There is no doubt that it will be edifying, but will it also be interesting? These reminiscences of the eighty-three year-old Bishop F. X. Gsell are recounted in conversational style and are completely captivating. And it is quite true that he had a hundred and fifty wives. Not, indeed, that he married them. As His Holiness the Pope observed when told of this unusual achievement: 'Oui, je comprends. Vous les achetez pour les délivrer.'

Bishop Gsell, a native of Alsace-Lorraine, spent his missionary life among the aborigines of the Northern Territory of Australia. He tells the story of his life-work as a missionary and not as an ethnologist. Incidentally, though, he gives the reader a remarkable amount of information about the tribal customs and practices of these primitive peoples. Concerning the spectacular number of his 'wives' Mgr Gsell explains that 'among the aborigines, a woman is born "married", and from the moment of her birth she belongs, as a chattel, to her mother's son-in-law who has been appointed as such by the tribe. It was from these sons-in-law that I bought the little girls, and not from their fathers.' These children were educated by the Sisters at the Mission until they were eighteen when, as free women, they could choose to return to their tribe.

The venerable author has a sharp word for those who disapprove of missionary activity. 'We do not forget', he comments pithily, 'that these fine talkers, few of whom have given the subject any deep thought, themselves enjoy the benefits of Christian civilization; and they enjoy this security because, in days of old, missionaries brought these benefits to their forefathers. The heathens are men as we are men and, as such, they have the same right that we have to the benefits of Christianity.' A biographic sketch of the Bishop by Père André Dupeyrat concludes these impressive reminiscences.

KIERAN MULVEY, O.P.