

That vague term—for a ‘good Catholic’ can be a bad Christian—is usually taken to mean a man of conservative habit of mind who accepts without question what the

Church requires his assent to in matters temporal as well as spiritual.

This is a truism to readers of this periodical but will not be to all readers of this book.

MICHAEL DAWNEY

**FEASTING WITH PANTHERS**, by Rupert Croft-Cooke. *W. H. Allen*, 1967. 35s.

There are three sections in this book; one deals with Swinburne and his circle, one with John Addington Symonds and his set, one with Oscar Wilde. On Swinburne and Symonds, Mr Croft-Cooke says little—one must almost say nothing—that is not history; on Swinburne he has drawn extensively, as all writers must, on Cecil Y. Lang’s masterly six-volume edition of the Swinburne letters, and on Symonds he has had the advantage of an absolutely stunning biography by Phyllis Grosskurth (1964). On Oscar Wilde, Mr Croft-Cooke is excellent, bringing into the oft-told story a host of new characters, including André Raffalovich and a former writer for *Blackfriars*, John Gray. For a book on the main theme of Victorian anomalies and perversions, the end-product is singularly genteel; it is not a volume for maiden aunts, but equally it is not likely to be banned on account of its language or its tone.

Nevertheless, there is an underlying current. Put at its most brusque, this is the inference that perverts of the *fin-de-siècle* were a good deal better off than they are today, ‘with a police force trained to spot it, even provoke manifestations of it’ (i.e. homosexual behaviour) ‘and prosecute it’ (p. 140). Mr Croft-Cooke also thinks that child-lovers of the Lewis Carroll persuasion would be treated rather more sternly today. Lewis Carroll went down every summer to Eastbourne to make friends with little girls on the beach. ‘What, one cannot help wondering vulgarly’, writes Mr Croft-Cooke, ‘would the Eastbourne police say about this today? Dodgson’s clergyman’s habit would no longer protect him from suspicion, rather the contrary. One can almost see the headlines—Famous Author Charged with Soliciting. Child invited to Stay in Lodgings. Search Reveals Indecent Photographs.’ Can one? For a book that is subtitled ‘A New Consideration of some Late Victorian Writers’ one is entitled to expect other than this space-consuming speculation. This, one might feel charitably, is a momentary lapse on the part of Mr Croft-Cooke, anxious to complete a subsection on a high note of

drama, but Mr Croft-Cooke rubs it in even more. ‘Today, “frustrated in the last analysis” or not he (Lewis Carroll) would find himself in Wormwood Scrubs.’ Surely this can’t be true? In any event, this is a sphere in which the facts are not on Mr Croft-Cooke’s side. In 1876, a forty-year-old man of ‘superior education’, Phillip Lyne, put his arm round the waist of a young girl. This conduct, said the chairman of the bench, was ‘unmanly, illegal and immoral’, and Lyne got two years hard labour at Wandsworth Prison. It is clear from the evidence of the six-hour case that Lyne did nothing more heinous; in the nineteenth century, magistrates were activated by anything that savoured of lost innocence, conscious that they had no way to touch the real evils of the period—the buying and selling of twelve-year-old virgins, the white slave traffic with Belgium, the accommodation-houses (there was one in Lupus Street set up for M.P.s), and an immense network of prostitution. There were also the homosexual clubs.

In his Introduction, Mr Croft-Cooke makes it clear that he is for sexual freedom. ‘When we are young we think there is a norm in human behaviour, particularly in sexual behaviour, and that away from its cosy fireside a few adventurous souls reprehensibly stray. . . . When we grow wiser and have read Havelock Ellis and Doctor Kinsey and received a few score confidences from persons of the most placidly conventional appearance, we realise that there is no such thing . . . we know that in the sexual propensities of mankind there is no norm, though there may be repressions, a respect for good manners, ethical or religious restraints or fear of consequence. . . .’ This is chilling, though it is not new; *Eros Denied* by Wayland Young (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1965) should be read in tandem with *Feasting With Panthers*.

Similarly the essay to make perversions, and especially homosexuality, respectable is not new. In the ‘nineties, well over a thousand works were published on homosexuality; it was given new names—simisexualism, homo-

genic love—and upgraded philosophically as *uranismus*, the female soul in the male body. Oscar Wilde gloried in his succession of stable-boys and billiard-markers. His trial in 1895 shattered the illusion of a golden age for homosexuals. This prosecution was, declares Mr Croft-Cooke, 'more than a sordid little case under a discreditable law . . . in a few months, in three public hearings, it obliterated the kind of individualism he and his literary fellows had claimed as a right'.

Scholars will not be impressed by this book, nor by the author's delineation of the period. It is quippy and over-bright, and some of his assumptions are, to say the least of it, hazardous, i.e. that Walter Pater was homosexual. Some of the statements are disturbing ('the blackmailing gangs whom Wilde knew are as busy today as then'). Whether or not this book gives to homosexual behaviour a historical validity is up to the reader.

Homosexuality is now a drawing-room topic; because of the startling theological proposition

that Christ was homosexual it is now a vestry—if no more—topic. New laws and the permissive society must surely make many of the strictures in this book obsolete. *Feasting with Panthers* does lead one to make a deliberate statement: There is no definitive twentieth-century attitude towards homosexuality. The France of the Marquis de Sade had no doubt about it—sodomy was punished with 'the living fire' (death by burning). Until 1828 in this country death was also the penalty for sodomy (if penetration was seen). It is authoritatively stated that 90 per cent of all present-day blackmail devolves around accusations of homosexuality. Whatever one's attitude, one would surely like to see this unfortunate 90 per cent off the hook. The outsider, not committed either way, may well echo Henry James; if homosexuals gather 'a band of the emulous, we may look for some capital sport'. And he said it eighty years ago.

RONALD PEARSALL

**THE STARVED AND THE SILENT**, by Aloysius Schwartz. *Victor Gollancz*, 1967. 216 pp. 30s.

The author is an American priest, working in Pusan, Korea. The book describes briefly the author's vocation to the missionary priesthood, and then the living conditions of the people in Korea and his own work among them. It is a conversational, straight-forward, gripping account of a terribly poor society and of individuals whom Fr Schwartz has encountered. The last sixty pages of the book provide a theological meditation upon poverty in the gospels, in the Church and in the world.

The approach may be rather over-simple at times, but prophets tend to be that way—they put their fingers straight into the wound, and that is what Fr Schwartz does: the wound of the affluent world and the affluent Church so marginally concerned with the quite appalling poverty of a country like Korea. The Church (meaning here especially the clergy) is affluent not only in the West, it can be so even on Korea. Take the following: 'A group of Sisters here, living under the vow of poverty and dedicated to the service of the poor, discovered recently that their living quarters were too small and uncomfortable, and so decided to build a new convent. The new convent was designed by a Swiss architect, no less, which would be appropriate if it were located in Zurich or Geneva. Unfortunately it is located

in Pusan—in one of the most poverty-depressed cities in the world. There the convent sits today in all its splendour looking out over the sea, rising up layer upon layer like a rich wedding-cake. It boasts such de luxe items as a private verandah for each nun's private room. The convent is sometimes mistaken for a resort hotel; it is never taken to be a house for poor women dedicated to serving poor people' (p. 62). Neither Pusan, nor Korea, is the only place where such things are being built today.

The documents of Vatican II tell us that poverty is 'the authentication of Christ's Church': the world can see that it genuinely is Christ's Church because it is poor: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to preach the gospel to the poor'. The Church of the poor. Today the institutional Church and its clerical leadership are by and large wealthier than they have ever been. Fifty million dollars may be spent in the U.S. this year refurbishing churches in the latest liturgical taste. In a world where the poor are more with us than ever, the Church is spending more upon herself than ever—smarter churches, de luxe presbyteries and monasteries, more drinks. Corrupt? Fr Schwartz appeals for a Church which would take poverty seriously: both the needs of the poor and her own lived image, as Francis