

Book Reviews

Nancy Stepan persuasively demonstrates that the scientific and social characteristics of Latin America meant that eugenics encompassed more than the racist and conservative social agenda that defined the movement elsewhere. "*The Hour of Eugenics*" is an excellent addition to the literature on eugenics and the history of science in Latin America.

Anne-Emanuelle Birn, The Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health

PAULINE M. H. MAZUMDAR, *Eugenics, human genetics and human failings: The Eugenics Society, its sources and its critics in Britain*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. x, 373, illus., £40.00 (0-415-04424-3).

Several studies have recently come out on the British eugenics movement, and this is one of the best. Displaying an impressive mastery of a range of different source materials, Pauline Mazumdar explains the statistical advances involved in human genetics by relating them to the careers and personalities of some of their main protagonists and also to the ideological and personal struggles taking place within the contemporary Eugenics Society. For human genetics, she shows, was inextricably bound up in its early years with the eugenics movement, which in turn had been shaped by the preconceptions of an earlier tradition of Victorian social reform, in which the focus of concern had been the existence of a hereditary class of paupers. Indeed, this "eugenics problematic", we are told, continued to dominate the field until it finally fell victim to the changes of social and political attitudes brought about by the Second World War—but not before its intellectual credibility had been undermined during the course of the 1930s by the work of a younger generation of scientists (among them, Lancelot Hogben, J. B. S. Haldane and Lionel Penrose), who found themselves sharply at odds with the class arrogance and political conservatism of their predecessors.

The case is so persuasively argued that it is easy to overlook the fact that the Eugenics Education Society was actually founded in 1907 at the very moment at which most politicians, administrators and social scientists were *breaking free* from "the eugenics problematic". After all, can old-age pensions and National Insurance seriously be seen as attempts to control a "hereditary pauper class"? Certainly by the 1920s the agenda of social politics was being dominated, not by the existence of a "residuum" of the casual poor, but by the problem of mass unemployment—something not easily explicable in terms of inherited defect. Thus, when "the biologists of the left" during the 1930s mounted their attacks on the eugenics movement for its class bias and its underestimation of the importance of the environment, they were simply coming round to a viewpoint which most laymen had held for at least twenty years or more. Little wonder, then, that the eugenics movement, unlike its Victorian forerunners (the Charity Organisation Society, for example), never gained the ear of the key formulators of social policy. Most readers of this stimulating book will probably conclude that the British people have had a lucky escape!

G. R. Searle, University of East Anglia

JUNE ROSE, *Marie Stopes and the sexual revolution*, London, Faber and Faber, 1992, pp. xiv, 272, £14.99 (0-571-1620-6).

It hardly needs saying that Marie Stopes was a key figure in popularizing birth control and redefining female sexuality in the early twentieth century. This is not the first biography; that appeared in 1924, authored, (dare one suggest, "ghost-written"?) by her close friend Aylmer Maude. Another, shortly after her death, was also by a male friend with whom she had enjoyed one of her recurrent ambiguous relationships, perhaps describable as "amitié amoureuse" (and perhaps not). Ruth Hall, in 1977, took a less indulgent attitude, but did not have access to all the material June Rose has consulted. None of these former biographies deals as searchingly with the extent of Stopes's construction of the myth of her own life. It is easy to become bemused by the amount of documentation: the enormous collection in the British Library, additional material in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre at the Wellcome Institute, further papers still in the hands of

Stopes's son. Surely, in this mass, "truth" must reside? But as Rose points out, in spite of this apparently comprehensive preservation, there are significant gaps where Stopes destroyed (actively or by neglect) important groups of correspondence.

In her play *Vectia* she mythicized her relationship with Aylmer Maude, who actually lodged with Marie and her first husband during the tense period leading up to the collapse of their marriage, as "a pure and straightforward relationship" without "the smallest hint of flirtation or love-making". Her surviving letters to him do not entirely bear this out, but since his own to her do not survive, a haze of conjecture still shrouds the relationship. Even her most famous personal myth—that she married Ruggles Gates in complete sexual ignorance and took years, and a course of study in the "Cupboard" in the British Museum, to realize that the marriage was unconsummated—subjected to scrutiny is seen to lie at some angle to the truth. (Interesting questions are raised by the way Stopes dowered her alter-ego "Vectia" with "healthy natural desires" for normal marriage and motherhood, but could not permit a virtuous woman technical knowledge of what was wrong with her marriage.) This capacity to create herself was fundamental to Stopes's success: "without her urgent day-dreams, she might never have headed a great campaign" (p. 147). But unless she could head, or see herself as a leader, Stopes was not greatly interested in working for causes which did not benefit herself: her influence in the birth control movement waned in the 1930s as organization took over from taboo-breaching propaganda as the task of the hour. This is an illuminating biography of a woman who made history, but now, perhaps, attention should be turned to the quieter heroines of the birth control movement, and the stories of "those who have no historian" as Stopes herself described them: the thousands of grateful and desperate souls helped by her writings.

Lesley A. Hall, Wellcome Institute

J. MIRIAM BENN, *Predicaments of love*, London, Pluto Press, 1992, pp. xiv, 304, £15.50 (0-7453-0529-6)

This excellent book is a study of the two generations of the Drysdale family associated with the Malthusian movement: George, author of the famous *Elements of social science: physical, sexual and natural religion*, his brother Charles Robert and his common-law wife Alice Vickery, their son Charles Vickery, and his wife Bessie.

The paucity of surviving family papers has acted as a stimulus to Dr Benn's project. She has resourcefully pursued every possible clue and provides us with a great deal of hitherto un-gathered information about this unusual family group. She has meticulously studied the published writings of all the individuals concerned, at times a tedious and repetitious task, particularly as CR and Alice Vickery would slant essentially the same paper on the small family system and the benefits of birth control to a wide variety of audiences. The attention to context is one of the strengths of the work and compensates for the lack of intimate revelations on the sex-life of Malthusians, as we are shown the rivalries and alliances between a host of socially and sexually reformist groups of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.

This is not to ignore the important illumination of the Drysdales themselves, in particular the elusive character of George. Like that of so many sexual reformers, his work sprang out of personal crisis. "Preventive intercourse" was only an aspect of a more far-reaching agenda of sexual reform, and *Elements of social science*, kept in print (anonymously) for many years at a low price, actually lost him money. An irony apparently unnoticed by Benn is that Drysdale, whose own near-suicidal breakdown appears to have been precipitated by horror-mongering about "onanism", himself came to terrorize others: Havelock Ellis's surprising neglect of Drysdale's pioneering work was presumably due to the dismay he had experienced at Drysdale's claim that nocturnal emissions inevitably led to debilitating spermatorrhoea.

Light is also shed on the careers of Charles Robert Drysdale and Alice Vickery. That they were never married, but living in free union is not deduced simply from the negative evidence of lack of