

It is characteristic of Lowther that the last word is "morrow" not "marrow."

The measure of this collection's strength is that one wants to quote almost every poem and share it with the reader: "100," a very beautiful, compassionate and quite unsentimental evocation of an old man; the exciting and disturbing "City Slides;" "Notes from Ferry Creek:" the lovely mountain poems "Early Winters" and "Coast Range"--the list is almost as long as the index. The only poem I have some misgivings about is "Kitchen Murder" where one catches a lethal whiff of Atwoodian attitudinizing.

In nearly every poem there is the delight of the unexpected but just right simile or metaphor: "the Fraser River/ which is immense/swollen like throat-veins;" of the old man whose "lips tremble/like black moths' wings, his eyes blue/ as watered milk startle/ through lenses of tears;" of a woman "your heavy scarlet smile/ held out like a credit card." And one could go on.

On the cover a noted "media-person" is quoted as saying that her death is to be deplored because she was "on the edge of whatever fame and success Canadian poetry has to offer." The real pity is that she is no longer here to feel the exhilaration of her own developing poetic power and to share with us her splendid, all-embracing

vision of stone. She has, however, left some of the best part of herself behind and it cannot be taken away from us. Much of this is implied in "Suspended:"

When you choose silence
I shall be like
the last rain drop
on a tree branch
waiting to fall

Imagine that I contain
branch tree
butterflies snakes
the entire forest
a sun
hardly a pin-prick's size
but bright enough
to spear your eye

and our hearts and memories.

Elizabeth Jones
Cambridge, Nova Scotia

The Proper Sphere Women's Place in Canadian Society. Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson (eds.). Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976. Pp. 334.

Have you ever wondered why it is a man who sells carpets in your local department store and not a woman? Or whether bad cooking leads to crime? The answers to these and other more serious questions lie tucked away in the ma-

materials that Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson have included in their documentary study, compiled for the Oxford University Press Canadian History Series.

The Proper Sphere is a fascinating sampling of Canadian writings on the "woman question" dating, with few exceptions, from the 1870s to the end of World War I. Statements by most of the major Canadian feminists of the period and by some of their best known critics are to be found in the collection, in all their contradictory complexity. The editors have divided the volume into seven parts which are basically thematic but which are also suggestive of chronological developments, beginning with general statements on the role of women in a section entitled "Woman's Proper Sphere" and ending with the movement for the suffrage. Brief introductory remarks to each section and to the volume as a whole, as well as the general ordering of the excerpts, sketch the faint beginnings of an interpretive framework for the history of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian feminism.

Perhaps it is well to dwell briefly on the question of dates, for the title unfortunately does not suggest any chronological limitations for the book. It is, however, firmly set in the period of reform prior to and during World War I. Although there is one document from the 1850s, this ap-

pears to have come from the pen of a Scottish visitor to Nova Scotia and is, moreover, the only piece which pre-dates Confederation. Every other item in the study, with the possible exception of two undated documents and two that are dated 1930 and 1946, was written or published after 1870 and before 1920. The volume does not attempt, then, to range widely over the history of woman's place in Canadian society or in Canadian history. It documents, rather, a particular and vitally important phase in that history, the movement for women's rights which culminated in the granting of the vote to women by the federal government and all provincial governments except Quebec, during and immediately after the First World War.

The protagonists in this story are women and men with all kinds of axes to grind and they appear in The Proper Sphere with all their warts. We see not only the brilliance of the feminists' arguments but their occasional lapses into bigotry and the contradictions inherent in some of their most deeply held convictions. If we are made aware of the basic misogyny of the anti-feminists, we also cannot fail to be impressed with their occasional flashes of insight. A thorough reading of these documents will surely provide students of Canadian history with a more realistic picture of the arguments and counterarguments, the beliefs and convictions, that con-

stituted the debate over Canadian woman and her "sphere" in the crucial half-century after Confederation.

Beyond this achievement, however, the documents and the introductory remarks of the editors also begin to suggest some of the common themes and characteristics of this debate. One basic theme is the focus on education. In 1872, Goldwin Smith believed that Canada was exempt from those "disturbing causes" which had bedevilled the women's movement in both the United States and England, the American anti-slavery movement, and the early radicalism of the British women's movement, compounded in the latter case with a political opportunism which coveted the women's vote. Not experiencing these influences, Smith argued, the Canadian women's movement was concerned almost exclusively with educational issues. Certainly the documents in this book suggest that in the early period this was basically the case. Readers will find discussions of women's education therefore not only in Part 3, which is exclusively devoted to that subject, but in other sections as well, especially in the introductory Part 1. Canadian feminists (as well as their adversaries) seem to have concentrated first on education, only gradually moving to serious agitation on other issues.

A second characteristic of the movement in Canada was its emphasis on

Christianity. Feminists and anti-feminists alike, if we accept the evidence of these documents, were fascinated by the relationship between "civilization," which they almost always defined as Christian, and the place of women in society. Women in "savage" or non-Christian societies are almost invariably portrayed as degraded slaves and Christian civilization equally often heralded as the source of women's emancipation, although opinions clearly differed on how far Christianity had been able to achieve this goal. One fascinating exception to the general equation of modern western civilization with either Christianity or progress for women appears in a tract by a Dr. Parker. Parker, for all her emphasis on Protestant reform and concern for female emancipation, emphatically did not see one or the other in Canada in 1890. The source of women's oppression, in her view, was not the slavery of the past, but, rather, the increasing power of the state. "God made man and woman equal," Parker declared, "The State has made woman inferior." She did not elaborate on this theme in the excerpt included here but clearly drew one basic conclusion from her belief. In order to infuse genuine Christianity into society, the state had to be reformed. And in order to reform the state, women needed political power.

Certainly, Canadian feminists increasingly shared this view and the demand

for the vote became intense in the decade before World War I. Yet, in contrast to what was happening in other parts of the western world, feminists in this country moved cautiously and with relative decorum. Evidence of Canadian conservatism is the almost complete absence of certain radical themes or topics from The Proper Sphere. There is no statement, for example, on women's right to birth control. Nor is the anarchist or socialist strain of feminism represented in the collection. Catherine Cleverdon informs us that Canada did produce socialist feminists in the prewar period; one can only conclude that Cook and Mitchinson did not feel their voices sufficiently representative or important to be included. Socialism is mentioned only twice in the book. Mme. Josephine Dandurand acknowledged its existence when she argued in 1901 that in England and America it was women who would bring about the reconciliation between the "anger" of socialists and the "injustice" of the aristocracy. But her belief in the reconciliatory powers of the women's movement was not shared by Father L. -A. Paquet, who, a few decades later, seemed to feel that there was little to choose between feminism and socialism. The success of one, he argued in 1918, would surely mean the victory of the other. According to Paquet, socialist books everywhere spread "the feminist poison." Recent analyses have cast some doubts on the feminism of many early

socialists but Father Paquet no doubt represented an important strain in Canadian thought. To their enemies, both socialism and feminism must also have seemed especially threatening by the end of the First World War, even in conservative Canada. Workers were clearly in a fighting mood and women were winning their battle for the vote. This was an unusual coincidence for the two appear rarely to have combined forces.

If The Proper Sphere presents an accurate picture of the Canadian women's movement as at first concerned chiefly with education, and as generally Christian and conservative, there are details of the interpretation which may be questioned. The radical strains of Canadian feminism, slight though they may have been, perhaps deserved a little space. Secondly, the editors tend to present an overly simple picture of the nineteenth century. They state, for example, that the "shorter life expectancy" of nineteenth-century women (and their larger families) meant essentially that "woman's career in the nineteenth century was motherhood." (p. 5) This seems to me to be somewhat misleading. The documents themselves show that women who did not marry were already perceived as a significant group by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their existence alone demonstrates that some women were not mothers. Secondly, although death in childbirth must have continued to take

its toll, demographers generally agree that the most telling cause of the shorter (average) life expectancy in the past was the relatively higher death rates of people under twenty years of age, rather than of older men or women. It can also be argued that the large families of the past have been exaggerated. If the average family size was larger than it is today, it must be remembered that there were always families on the low side of the average. Finally, the editor note elsewhere in the book that the Canadian birth rate began to decline around 1870. Thus not all married women were forever tied to childbearing. In sum, the late nineteenth century must already have produced many women who either never became mothers because they never married, or who, if middle class, had a period of relative leisure to look forward to after the period of childbearing and childrearing. Certainly Marjorie MacMurchy felt in 1919 that the women's club movement had functioned to supply "middle aged women" with something to occupy the time that hung heavy on their hands. Could her statement not also have applied to some extent to the club women of the 1880s and 1890s?

Two other mildly misleading statements result from the editors' focus on the period after 1870. Cook and Mitchinson argue, to take the most important example, that there was "little controversy over whether women should be allowed to attend elementary or high

schools." (p. 119) This statement ignores the fierce arguments which occurred over the presence of girls in the grammar schools (the precursors of the high schools) in Ontario in the 1860s, as well as the ongoing debate about the pros and cons of co-education. Many of the private schools and academies which were founded as elite alternatives to the high schools and collegiate institutes during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, in Ontario at least, originated in the belief in single sex, as well as church-affiliated, schooling for middle-class adolescents.

I would also like to introduce a very small caveat on the subject of feminist lack of awareness of the "philosophical implications" of their demands. (p. 93) Cook and Mitchinson may be right in stating that the vast majority of Canadian feminists, in the period under consideration, were women of a practical turn of mind, who preferred to ignore the contradiction between their demand for political and legal equality on the one hand, and their demand for protective legislation on the other. But at least one sharp, old-time feminist had been concerned about this, Anna Jameson, who admittedly was not a Canadian resident for very long, but who did comment extensively on women's issues in Upper Canada in the late 1830s, expressed grave doubts about an Upper Canadian law for "making the remedy in cases of

THE PROPER SPHERE



He— 'Aren't you afraid, dear, that a vote would make you masculine?'
She— 'It has not seemed to make you so, dearest.'

seduction more effectual" precisely because she did see the contradiction. "The best boon we could ask of our masters and legislators," Jameson argued then, "is to be left in all cases responsible for our own actions and our own debts." However, it would appear that the times were not ready for such logic, either in the 1830s or at the turn of the century. Faced with the existence of inequality, feminists have always had to choose between protective measures and more radical paths which might lead to genuine equality. The Proper Sphere documents a place and a period in which protective legislation designed solely for women (or for women and children) seemed the right solution to many problems.

For feminists today, this book raises many questions. Certainly it was a shock for this Torontonion, who thought that something was finally right in the world when a woman was appointed principal of Jarvis Collegiate a few years ago, to read that Ontario's first woman high school principal had already been appointed by 1893. We may dismiss with a laugh the suggestion in The Grain Grower's Guide that crime is a direct result of bad cooking. But we are bound to take more seriously Goldwin Smith's contention that "cycles of separation and devotion to different functions may . . . have impressed upon the moral character and the intellect of each sex differences now indelible," how-

ever much we may disagree in the final analysis with this view. And certainly we cannot help pondering Charlotte Whitton's devastating "Is the Canadian Woman a Flop in Politics?" (1946) which the editors have added as a questioning postscript to their book. Why did not Canadian women of the 1920s, '30s and '40s grasp the political power that earlier feminists had so urgently sought for them? Was it, as Whitton suggests, because most Canadian women had not really fought for it? Was it, as Cook and Mitchinson imply, because it was naive to think that real power resided in the political process in the first place? Or was Helen MacMurphy right in her belief, expressed as early as 1919, that Canadian women had become so wrapped up in organizing that they had forgotten why they had organized in the first place?

Cook and Mitchinson wisely do not attempt to answer these questions. Their volume, after all, does not really deal with the period after 1920. But the documents that they have assembled suggest at least partial answers. Canadian feminists between 1870 and 1920 had to fight not only the intelligence of opponents like Goldwin Smith, but the ridicule and venom that issued forth from more frightened critics. And behind such critics stood armies of others, who never wrote or spoke a word on the subject, but quietly voted down feminist measures in Canadian legisla-

tures year after year. The women themselves were far from united. Embracing and embraced by an immense variety of causes and goals, the women's movement must have devoted enormous amounts of energy to creating networks and trying to analyse the sources of women's discontent. Perhaps there was little energy left over after the analysis and debate and the organizing were done. Cook and Mitchinson also imply the existence of an immense weight of feminine apathy about women's issues in Canada. One is inclined to label such commentary "blaming the victim," but there is no doubt that it contains a grain of truth. Many women were too busy surviving to respond to the turn of the century women's movement but for many others a measure of upward mobility or material improvement in their lives seems to have produced a complacent mentality that led away from active involvement in any social or political cause. Such are the hidden actors who never appear on the pages of documentary studies but whose importance historians--and modern feminists--neglect at their peril.

Alison Prentice
O.I.S.E.

The Parliament of Women The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976. Pp. 487.

Even in the 1970s, the National Council of Women of Canada claims to speak for large numbers of Canadian women. The council's claims have a hollow ring today, but when the organization was founded at the turn of the century it did provide a focal point for a wide spectrum of female activity, both progressive and conservative. The history of the Council's development, from its founding in 1893 until the end of the 1920s is the subject of Veronica Strong-Boag's book The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929. Strong-Boag has provided an important guide to the origins and development of an organization that was central not only to the activities of middle-class Canadian women but also to the development of moderate social reform in Canada.

In her narrative account, Strong-Boag attempts to give a just and balanced assessment of the achievements of the National Council by emphasizing the genuine, concrete contributions it made to Canadian society. However, her overall picture stresses the weaknesses of the organization. The height of the Council's strength and influence occurred in the first few