

Book Reviews

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

marriage certificate or birth certificates for their children, but from the rational explanation this equivocal status would provide for certain peculiarities of behaviour and attitude.

A valuable work, which sheds much light on Victorian “counter-culture”, the early birth control movement, feminism, and sexual reform.

Lesley A. Hall, Wellcome Institute

DANIEL J. KEVLES and LEROY HOOD (eds), *The code of codes: scientific and social issues in the human genome project*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. x, 398, £23.95 (0-674-13645-4).

The Human Genome Project (HGP) is Big Science. Simply put, its aim is to map all the genes found in human beings, a goal the molecular biologist Walter Gilbert has called the “grail of human genetics”.

The code of codes is a collection of fourteen essays on the HGP. The book is divided into three sections. Daniel Kevles and Horace Freeland Judson cover ‘History politics, and genetics’; five scientists (including Gilbert and James Watson) offer perspectives on ‘Genetics, technology, and medicine’; and six commentators from a variety of disciplines consider ‘Ethics, law, and society’: the book concludes with the editors’ ‘Reflections’.

The editors’ intention is to “stimulate thought about the diversity of issues” that the HGP provokes. They succeed admirably in this task. The strength of this collection lies in the way in which social, legal, scientific, and ethical issues share the same space (although no space is given to a critical appraisal of the HGP on any of these grounds). Rarely can a contemporary scientific enterprise have been so clearly—and accessibly—shown to be deeply embedded in society.

The scientists’ essays are models of optimism. Their message is simple: all the problems of the project (scientific or otherwise) will be solved, and the benefits will be legion. The HGP is presented as an almost religious quest; Gilbert’s essay is entitled ‘A vision of the grail’. Somewhat suprisingly, perhaps, it is Kevles who is most explicit in his use of such imagery, concluding that the first complete human genome sequence would be “a multinational and multiracial melange, a kind of Adam II, his encoded essence revealed for the twenty-first century and beyond”.

Most of the non-scientists, however, eschew the temptation to dwell on “big” aspects of the HGP, instead offering sensitive accounts of specific, local restrictions on the use of genetic information. Particularly engaging analyses are found in Nancy Wrexler’s essay on the social and clinical implications of genetic research on Huntington’s disease, and Dorothy Nelkin’s exploration of the interpretative pitfalls of genetic testing (complemented by Eric Lander’s piece on DNA fingerprinting).

Equally fascinating is Evelyn Fox Keller’s siting of the HGP within a contemporary “eugenics of normalcy”, countering Kevles’ suggestion that, since the mid-1960s, human genetics has been “emancipated from its eugenic antecedents”. Keller also reinforces the point, made by several contributors, that at present the only “therapy” made possible by genetic research is preventive, i.e. abortion.

British readers may be frustrated by the American bias of the book, particularly when dealing with the impact of the HGP on health insurance. But this bias has deeper resonances. From Kevles’ intriguing account of the local (i.e. American) political climate in which the HGP was launched, to Hood’s bare statement that the HGP will “secure the leadership of the United States in biotechnology and present U.S. industry with a wealth of opportunities”, there runs a strand of scientific cultural imperialism.

This tension pervades the book: the HGP is global, yet its history and structure is intimately tied up with the interests of the United States, especially its biotechnology companies. As in politics, so in biology: today’s wars are fought on the floor of the world’s stock exchanges. The political rhetoric is already in place: Watson’s ‘Personal view of the project’ echoes Franklin D. Roosevelt, stating that the HGP has nothing to fear but fear itself.

For those made uneasy by all this, the editors’ concluding remarks may provide some solace.