

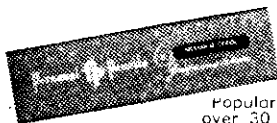


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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

has to suffice for the Duke of Alba's ruthless wars in the Netherlands and for the horrors of the Holy Inquisition.

Few of us know anything about the old ruling house of Bavaria or of Ludwig the Second, one of the last kings to reign before Bavaria was swallowed up by Bismarck and the German Empire. Of a highly eccentric family, Ludwig was given to sordid habits and formidable manias—for excessive solitude, for re-living the old legends in Wagnerian operas, for the building of vast and useless palaces. Yet, driven by loneliness and the fear of madness, he commands our pity rather than our disgust. Though David Stacton re-creates the unhappy king's thoughts and emotions with remarkable perception and sympathy, his almost morbid thoroughness of detail and irritating metaphysical outbursts tend to leave the reader

in an unrewarding state of Germanic gloom. History can tell us all we need to know—better to let Ludwig rest in decent oblivion.

—K.C.

"THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE"

THE VICTORIAN HEROINE, a Changing Ideal, 1837-1873, by Patricia Thomson: Oxford University Press, English price 18.

THE position of women during much of the Victorian era may move us today to laughter, tears, or blasphemy. A woman had few rights or opportunities. Married, she was denied divorce and could not own property. When Mrs Gaskell showed her clergyman husband her first cheque for writing, he put it, quite as a matter of course, into his pocket. The lack of occupation for the "lady" enraged Florence Nightingale. Deeper down was the wish, though it might not be clearly formulated, to be treated, in the words of a famous stage heroine, as a human being, to be regarded as man's equal companion.

All this and more, Patricia Thomson covers in a book of original design. Through heroines of fiction from 1837, when the Queen acceded, to 1873, when she says, almost every important emancipation movement had been set on foot, she traces "the interplay between the feminist movement and the Victorian novel." In 1873 John Stuart Mill died, who had written in his *Subjection of Women* that few men had any idea of the real characters, thoughts and capabilities of the women in their households. This is a scholarly and lively work, citing over a hundred novels, which may be enjoyed as a literary thesis or a social document. We read how women of leisure occupied themselves with "good works"; how the indigent took to governessing, for as little as £15 a year, liable to be distrusted and despised; and of the impact on fiction of what was called "the social evil," but is now known by one plain word.

The variety in the novelists' attitudes is instructive and diverting. Dickens, says Dr Thomson, demanded no more and no less for a happy marriage than a "true and loving heart." Thackeray could draw women clear-sightedly, but was apt to think of a wife as a home comfort, somewhat akin perhaps to Patmore's "Angel in the House," all of whose wisdom was "to love him for being wise."

Jane Eyre is the chief heroine of these annals. Like Becky Sharp, she set a new fashion of regarding herself first as a woman and then as a dependent. Expected to be submissive as a governess, she scandalised convention by indulging herself "in passions, emotions and resentments that were the privilege of the upper classes," and was held to be more subversive than Miss Sharp.

It is a far cry indeed to the woman of today who works in factory, office or profession, but we must not suppose that this is only a period piece. There will always be cramping men, and women who are doormats and rebels.

—A.M.

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