History

POVERTY AND COMPASSION: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians. *By Gertrude Himmelfarb. Knopf. 496 pp. $30*

Most arguments about how to deal with poverty come down, ultimately, to different interpretations of compassion. Himmelfarb, professor emeritus of history at City University of New York, distinguishes between "sentimental" compassion, which consists of moral indignation and *feeling* good, and "unsentimental" compassion, which is practical and seeks above all to *do* good. Himmelfarb profiles the era in which British reformers brought to the fore the practice of this unsentimental compassion. The era begins roughly with, and continues for a generation after, the publication of the first volume of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889), a book which calculated a morally freighted "arithmetic of woe." The period, much like our own 1960s, rediscovered poverty even as poverty was declining. What united Himmelfarb's late Victorian reformers—from the neoclassical economist Alfred Marshall to the religious reformer Arthur Toynbee to the Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb—was their blend of realism *and* morality: They were convinced that the state had to assume a greater role in coping with poverty but, at the same time, that the poor required moral guidance as much as money.

At the end of this period, Beatrice Webb criticized the unconditional social benefits being advocated by the young Winston Churchill. In 1909 Churchill objected to tying social benefits to personal behavior, saying, "I do not like mixing up moralities and mathematics." By then, however, events were passing the Victorians by. They had done much through their writing to foster more compassionate government—the era saw the extension of housing aid, workmen's compensation, schooling, unemployment insurance—but the compassion of the emerging welfare state was increasingly what Himmelfarb calls sentimental, "an exercise in moral indignation." As the welfare state grew, she argues, "it became a moral principle to eschew moral distinctions and judgments." Later reformers, "with a much attenuated commitment to religion, redoubled their social zeal as if to compensate. . . .It was then that the passion for religion was transmuted into the compassion for humanity." A century later, as compassion in its unsentimental guise slowly works its way back into social policy, this is an era—and a book—worth studying.

REVOLUTION AND REBELLION IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD. *By Jack A. Goldstone. Univ. of Calif. 608 pp. $34.95*

A generation ago, the accepted view of revolutions, found in such books as Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* (1963) and Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution* (1965), was that great political upheavals occurred when conditions were improving and popular expectations were dangerously high. Goldstone, director of the Center for Comparative Research in History, Society, and Culture at the University of California, Davis, stands much of this old thinking on its head.

All of the revolutions Goldstone considers, from the Ottoman Crisis in the early 17th century to the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, were preceded by periods in which population growth was rapid but material production failed to keep pace. With their economies based almost entirely on agriculture, old regimes had little flexibility in dealing with large fluctuations in population. Massive growth made goods less available, causing both soaring inflation and state fiscal crises. At the same time, social turmoil and fluctuation created at least the illusion of social mobility, "a scramble for credentials," as Goldstone calls it, and attendant friction between the haves and have-nots.