

born of an Iowa radical is a measure of his breadth. The lectures must have been a delight to hear, as they are to read.

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*A Woman's Ministry: Mary Collson's Search for Reform as a Unitarian Minister, a Hull House Social Worker, and a Christian Science Practitioner*, by Cynthia Grant Tucker. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984. xviii, 216 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 cloth.

Cynthia Grant Tucker's book about a woman's "search for reform as a Unitarian minister, a Hull House social worker, and a Christian Science practitioner," to quote the subtitle, is difficult to categorize and review. It is not a comprehensive biography of Mary Collson (1870-1953). It is not a study of her "life and times," that investigates the major social and intellectual developments in America during the course of her lifetime. It is not a work in "woman's history," that focuses on gender as its central issue or organizing principle. Nor is it a history of Unitarianism or Christian Science in nineteenth and twentieth century America. It is, instead, a work that touches on all of these. Furthermore, it is a study of a seemingly important yet virtually unknown woman which leaves the reader rather ambivalent about the subject and uncertain about her significance in American history. Did an unjust and sexist society stifle this brilliant and dedicated woman and hide what she accomplished, or was she a troubled individual who was unable to live up to her convictions and remained relatively obscure for good reason? Were there other Mary Collsons in the world, or was she an exceptional, perhaps even a unique, individual? Unfortunately, to be honest, one cannot tell from this work.

The book begins with Mary Collson's childhood in Iowa. She was born and grew up in the frontier town of Humboldt, in the northwestern part of the state. Humboldt's pioneers were Unitarians who, infused with the spirit of transcendentalism and liberal reform, colonized the town in the interests of freedom and equality for all, male and female, black and white. The Collson family's inability to achieve prosperity, however, which young Mary blamed on an incompetent father, who thus "did not inspire in . . . [her] a high opinion of men," had a profound effect on her life (4). So, too, did a prodigious group of female Unitarian ministers known as the Iowa Sisterhood, under whose tutelage she fell. After becoming the darling of the liberal community in this rather remarkable town, Collson went east to become a Unitarian minister and then returned to Iowa to assume a pulpit in the poor farming town of Ida Grove.

To her dismay, there was much opposition to a woman minister in Ida Grove, even among her Unitarian congregants; unlike Humboldt residents, they were not yet ready or willing to support female leadership. For Collson this led to a good deal of self-doubt and depression, and the decision to leave the pulpit in favor of a new ministry: that of chief probation officer for the nation's first juvenile court in Chicago, where she lived at the famed Hull House. In Chicago, however, she quickly became acquainted with urban poverty and the consequences it had on its unfortunate victims. She thus turned from the uplifting of souls to reforming society, from practicing casework with delinquent youngsters to political and social reform. Socialism and the labor movement became her chief passions. Yet again she had difficulty coping with the situation. The corruption, the frustration, and the human wreckage she witnessed all around her wore her down. So, too, did her disillusionment with her Hull House colleagues and what seemed to her to be their fruitless ameliorative efforts. Political organization and new social and political programs, she concluded, were no more successful in improving the world than the slow, patient forces her Unitarian elders had preached.

This time relief and rehabilitation came—at least for a while—through Christian Science, or “mind cure.” While both her Hull House associates and her mentors in Iowa were aghast, Eddyism actually suited her well. As a Unitarian, she had long believed in the intimacy between a divine source of power and the human spirit. Christian Science, then, seemed to be a way of giving practical “scientific” expression to her liberal religious heritage. Moreover, its denial of human suffering was precisely what Collson wanted, indeed needed, to hear; it allowed her to escape a world with which she could not cope. Besides, practitioners were quite well paid, and she was in dire financial condition, a matter of some importance.

Before long Collson again ran into difficulty. Both the hostile residents in Evansville, Indiana, where she became a Christian Science practitioner, and the church itself, which she found too confining (especially when it expected her to be dependent upon her teacher, a dictatorial male for whom she had very little respect), gave her trouble. After a childhood environment that had fostered independence and a love of intellectual freedom, and after years of trying to become her own master, she came to believe that she was under the control of the very dogmatism she had deplored. She felt trapped in the organization's bureaucracy. The remainder of her life proved no more satisfying or stable. She continued to vacillate between social reform and individual counseling; between political and economic change and spiritual “correction” metaphysically achieved; between

political and economic solutions such as woman suffrage, pacifism, socialism, and communism (which, in the 1930s, seemed to offer the kind of society of which the Christian ideal spoke) and the solution of mental healing, which she eventually concluded was unscientific and hence "of no use whatsoever in solving human problems" (152).

The real question, of course, is whether Mary Collson was a weak, and perhaps even an ill, person who sought to escape from reality, or an enormously sensitive and caring person whose health and dedication to humanity gave way to a society not yet ready for, or threatened by, such a woman. Also, why did the Jane Addamses, the Lillian Walds, the Florence Kelleys, and others like them remain active in the world while Mary Collson, trained as a rationalist, spent so much of her life as a mystic? Unfortunately, *A Woman's Ministry* does not answer these important questions. Yet, having said that, the book still is worth reading. While it does not establish the significance of Mary Collson in the world of late nineteenth and twentieth century social reform or mind healing, it does reveal a good deal about both. In addition, in this reviewer's opinion, there is no better brief account of the early history of the Church of Christian Science, especially of its structure and internal operation.

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*Dust Bowl Diary*, by Ann Marie Low. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. xii, 188 pp. \$17.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper.

*Dust Bowl Diary* is a first-hand account of Ann Marie Low's experiences growing up on a stock farm in North Dakota during the lean years between 1927 and 1937. The book tells, as the author says, two stories. One story is "an account of the effect of the drouth, depression and government programs" upon Low's family and neighbors, and the other story is that of growing up female in the rural grasslands of the Midwest. Low reveals both stories through diary entries made over the ten year period, and through complementary narrative based on her recollections.

The author begins her account in 1927, her sophomore year in high school and the last of the profitable years on her parents' 640-acre stock farm in the "Stony Brook" country near Kensal, North Dakota. Hard times began in 1928 when a hailstorm devastated the family's crops, the local bank failed, and low market prices set in. In 1929 drouth began and the stock market failed. By 1934 dust obscured fenceposts and sifted into every corner of the house. Low complained that "life in what the newspapers call 'the Dust Bowl' is

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