

Bad Faith - A Forgotten History of Family and Fatherland by Carmen Callil.
Jonathan Cape 2006.

In 1960, following a failed suicide attempt when she was 21, Carmen Callil was referred to a half-Australian doctor and psychiatrist called Anne Darquier with whom she was associated until the latter's death in 1970. Following her death, and some discrepancy about the name under which she was buried, Carmen Callil became fascinated in her former doctor's past and as she delved deeper she uncovered a quite extraordinary story that in some ways epitomised the French experience in the first half of the 20th century, and particularly in the years leading up to, and then during, the Nazi Occupation of France and the existence of the Vichy collaborationist statelet.

For Anne Darquier, abandoned in England by her parents, was the daughter of the notorious Vichy official Louis Darquier and his dipsomaniac Tasmanian wife Myrtle Jones.

Bad Faith tells many stories rolled into one seamless whole: the childhood and upbringing of Louis and Myrtle, their young adulthood, their marriage (possibly bigamous on her part), their lives in various places constantly battling with little money and expensive tastes, their apotheosis during the days of Vichy, and the aftermath of the war leading up to their deaths. In addition there is the story of Anne herself, brought up in Oxfordshire by simple country folk who cherished and protected her in equal measure with next to no support from her parents or family.

Dominating the story however is the life of Louis Darquier, a lifelong and most vicious anti-Semite, responsible for sending many thousands of French Jews to their deaths in Auschwitz, a cad of the highest order, utterly amoral, brutal and loathsome. Callil brings him to life in a way that leaves an unforgettable impression on the reader, and in so doing explains a great deal in microcosm about Vichy France, its dubious principles and the levels of anti-Semitism in France before and during the Second World War.

This is a superb history of a dreadful period of French history and some deeply loathsome French men and women that should take a prominent place in the canon of Second World War and Holocaust-related literature and deserves to be very widely read.

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