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**Review of *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* By Stephen O' Connor**

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*Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed.* By Stephen O' Connor. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. Photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xxi + 362 pp. \$27.00.

Charles Loring Brace, who began working among the poor as a city missionary and became the force behind the New York Children's Aid Society (CAS), is best remembered as the architect of the orphan trains, a placement program that sent thousands of orphaned, destitute, and abandoned children to new homes, including those in the Plains states. This biography of Brace places him within the context of his times and renders a more extensive view of the man and his beliefs than found in other publications. The volume offers insights into CAS programs for the poor in New York City and, in its conclusion, discusses current child welfare policies.

The primary focus is on the orphan trains. There are some nicely drawn sketches of individual children's experiences, and overall the author, an adjunct professor of creative writing, presents a well-written, easy read. The book adds little, however, to what is known already. There is no new analysis or research (some sections are attributed at length to the

work of other authors), and some statements are misleading, if not patently false. To say, for example, that CAS placed Catholic children in Protestant homes because there were “very few Catholics living outside the major East Coast cities” suggests how little the author knows of western populations—or cared to learn. Moreover, to assume that youngsters who failed to adapt to new surroundings were psychologically prone to be unhappy anywhere blames the children rather than the system. These and other contentions, including the assertion that Brace “reinvented” indenture through the orphan train system, are cause for concern.

In the final analysis, readers are encouraged to enjoy the ease of the text, but cautioned to approach the content with a critical eye.

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