

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLBOOK IS BACK IN THE BOOKSHOPS

Richard Handyside republished *The Little Red Schoolbook* this week, with minor revisions in the 26-page section on sex. Earlier this year police raided his warehouse and seized copies of the first edition. He was found guilty of possessing "obscene material". Mr Handyside, who has published works by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, claimed that it was a political prosecution. The judgment was described by the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society as a victory for those who seek to impose their bigoted views on the rest of the community. In the new edition passages attacked by the prosecution (a total of 12 "offending lines" have been re-written without compromising the overall tone, in consultation with the publisher's lawyers). The re-written passages are clearly marked by a line beside the text and italic type. One paragraph outside the sex section, specifically condemned as obscene by the appeal court, is covered with a non-removable red sticker. There is a new introduction explaining the alterations.

"A Total Mockery of Justice"

Richard Handyside issued a Press statement on Tuesday in which he describes both the original magistrate's hearing and the appeal to have been a total mockery of justice. The proceedings, particularly in the appeal court, were conducted by the prosecution along blatantly political lines. Mr Handyside said he did not accept the censorship implicit in the prosecution. Recognising the reality of the courts' power in our present society, he nevertheless rejects its arbitrary, illogical and politically-biased application. He also protests against the appeal court's order that he should pay the full costs of the prosecution, estimated at £1,000. This order was in effect a savage fine for having had the temerity to appeal against the magistrate's verdict.

Quite apart from being far beyond the publisher's very limited financial resources (which were known to the court), this "fine" is yet another example of the completely arbitrary power of the courts to award costs, emphasising yet again the fact that all but the financially well-off are strongly deterred from appealing against unjust convictions.

The appeal judge, Judge Gerald Hines, dismissed as extremists the defence witnesses who stated that the book "could do nothing but good to young people". Mr Handyside comments: "These 'extremists' were two comprehensive school headmasters, a headmistress, an eminent psychologist, a Professor of Education, the Director of the Sussex University Health Service, the Managing Director of Penguin Educational Books, and a lady doctor who runs the London Youth Advisory Service and is also a JP.

Absurd Proceedings

"Judge Hines preferred to heed the evidence of the prosecution witnesses who shared his view of established

authority and were therefore 'more representative'. These included Dr Myer Simm, a Birmingham psychiatrist who stated that oral sex was 'a perversion indulged in only by the sexual adventurer or the prostitute and her client'; Miss Elizabeth Manners, a headmistress who declared herself to be strongly opposed to any sex before marriage; and another elderly spinster headmistress, Dame Mary Green. The court apparently saw no incongruity in the position of unmarried elderly women, professedly opposed to pre-marital sex, giving advice on the subject to young girls.

"Equally incongruous, and typical of the proceedings, was the position of the prosecuting counsel, Mr Michael Corkery, on masturbation. Having in the magistrate's court supported the view of an elderly doctor that masturbation led to physical and mental decay, in the appeal hearing he specifically rejected this view.

"As if to further emphasis the unreality and absurdity of the proceedings, one of the magistrates (part of the three-man appeal committee) appeared to many impartial observers to be fast asleep during two-thirds of the five-day hearing."

Courts Out of Touch

The publisher believes that these courts are totally out of touch with the real world around them and that the use of their power to suppress opinions with which they happen to disagree is a gross abuse of justice. This is why *The Little Red Schoolbook* has been republished, in an edition of 100,000 copies. These are on sale in bookshops throughout Britain. Approximately 20,000 have already been ordered, so that people here (as in the 16 other countries where editions are or shortly will be available) may, as the book says, "judge for themselves".

THE LOGIC OF NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM: SOURCE DOCUMENTS AND THE MYTH THEORY

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

This is the first part of an article in which the author surveys some of the arguments used in discussions on the subject.

Jesus of Nazareth is, without doubt, one of the most influential figures in the history of the world. It is therefore extraordinary that the sources of information about his life are so meagre, and so problematic. How could so imposing a personality fail to leave an overwhelming impression on his contemporaries? Yet outside his immediate circle of followers, he went virtually unnoticed in his lifetime, and this fact, coupled with the extreme unreliability of the New Testament documents from the viewpoint of modern historical criticism, has led some scholars—albeit a tiny minority—to doubt Jesus' historical existence. What, then, are the arguments on which the so-called "myth theory" is based?

Many elements of the Christian story, including the virgin birth and the central notion of a god dying to redeem mankind, are paralleled in the pagan cults that flourished in the Greco-Roman world. What is distinctive about the Christian religion, it is argued, is that the cult-figure around whom the legends grew is also a historical figure: Jesus actually walked the earth, in the reigns of the Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius, and the gospel of Luke attempts an elaborate synchronisation of Jesus' career with the course of secular history. Turning, then, to contemporary pagan and Jewish sources for independent evidence of the life of Jesus, we find that references to him are few and, for the most part, suspect. But if there is no concrete historical evidence that Jesus ever existed, then surely Christianity takes its place among the "mystery religions" of Osiris, Isis and Mithras, with its specific historical claims destroyed. And if this is so, the implications for traditional Christianity are inimical in the extreme.

The Troublemakers

By firmly locating early Christian thought in its Hellenistic context in which redemptionist legends of all kinds flourished, the myth theory has clearly made a valuable contribution to the study of Christian origins. As, however, connection is not to be indiscriminately equated with derivation, it does not follow that Christianity is merely an offshoot of the mystery religions of the ancient middle east, which following the eastward movement of Roman imperialism starting in the first century BC were to find a fertile soil in the Greco-Roman world. The problem of the adequacy of the non-Christian testimony to Jesus is thus all the more urgent, given that interpretation of the Christian sources is a highly intricate process made more so by the fusion of Jewish and pagan ideas we find therein. It will be my contention that, although exegesis of this non-Christian material is also complex, the tentative conclusions that we can draw, support the orthodox view that the origins of Christianity make most sense with an historical Jesus. Moreover, the non-Christian sources generally confirm the deductions that we can make from the New Testament material about the nature of primitive Christianity. As in this field we are dealing with interpretations of interpretations—for that, essentially, is what New Testament criticism is about—the logic of the arguments deployed becomes peculiarly important. For as the brute facts are so few, the assumptions from which we start become vital as does the consistency of the inferences we can make.

Pagan references to Jesus and his followers in the first and second centuries AD are scanty and uninformative. Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia from AD 111 to 113, wrote to the emperor Trajan asking guidance on the action he should take about the Christians, "who sing to Christ, as to a god". This cannot be taken as admissible evidence for an historical Jesus. Suetonius, who wrote his *Lives of the Caesars* in the early second century, refers to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius (41-54) on the grounds that the Jews were "perpetually stirring up trouble at the instigation of Chrestus". Even if this "Chrestus" can be identified with Christ, the text does not prove his historicity: for Christians were accustomed to say of Jesus that he lived and worked "in their midst".

An Exceptional Case ?

The most famous, and fruitful, of the Roman references to Jesus is of course the passage in Tacitus' *Annals of Imperial Rome*, which date from circa 120. Tacitus, who was an educated upper class Roman and held high office under Domitian and Trajan, presumably knew the official Roman view of Christianity. He relates that Nero tried to throw responsibility for the great fire in Rome of July 64 on the Christians. The name of this sect came from Christ, who was executed in the reign of Tiberius by the then governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. The entire passage is fiercely hostile to the Christians, deploring the spread of the "superstition" from Judaea to Rome. As no Christian would have written so disparagingly of his faith, the passage cannot be a Christian interpolation. The authenticity of the text is not, however, proof of its reliability as historical evidence, for the question remains where Tacitus found his information. If he were merely echoing the Christian version of Jesus and his death, Tacitus' evidence would not witness to an independent pagan tradition about him.

The first possibility is that Tacitus had access to an official report about Jesus in the state archives. This, although conceivable, is unlikely, for Tacitus tells us elsewhere in the *Annals* that he did not enjoy access to the official records. It is true that in the last major persecution of Christianity under Diocletian (284-305), so-called *Acta Pilati* were disseminated among the common people purporting to be copies of an original report by Pilate to the Senate and People of Rome, finding against Jesus. But it is probable that this was an official forgery, designed to discredit Christianity; moreover, it is not plausible that Pilate should have submitted any kind of report on Jesus to the imperial government at Rome. For given the turbulent condition of Judaea at the time, the arrest and subsequent crucifixion of suspected agitators was a routine police measure; thousands of Jewish patriots met their death that way in first century Palestine. Why should the case of Jesus have been considered so exceptional by the Roman procurator of Judaea as to require a special written report to the emperor at Rome?

Could Tacitus have derived his information from a Christian or Jewish source? He certainly drew on the Jewish historian Josephus for some of his material, and it is possible that an allusion to Jesus in Josephus provided the basic information for the text in the *Annals*. But Josephus' references to Jesus form a problem all of their own. If, on

(Continued at foot of next page)

THE MYSTERY OF THE SWAYING PILLAR

M. TOLMACHEV

A crowd of pilgrims genuflected and looked with awe at Gavazan—the sacred pillar of the Titev Monastery. That day a rich gift was being presented to the monastery—a lot of gold, by a prince who had just suppressed insurgent peasants. If the prince's gift was acceptable to God, he would give a sign—the immense pillar made of basalt slabs would sway.

The pillar was obscured in the shadows of the gallery of the prior's quarters. With every minute the sky in the East turned more crimson as the sun rose. The shadows from the gallery got thicker and the pillar seemed to disappear completely. The cross on top seemed to be separated from the pillar and floating in the air. Then the prior came and genuflected to Gavazan.

The pilgrims waited and suddenly the cross swayed, returned to its former place, then swayed to the right again. The stone pillar was swaying like a pendulum! Wide-eyed, the mountaineers looked agog at this sign from God. Did this mean that God was always on the side of the princes?

When there was nobody left in the courtyard, the prior stood up, went to the sacred pillar and pushed it. Again the cross floated in the sun's rays, the pillar swayed. This made the prior grin . . .

A Mystery Solved

The pillar was erected at the turn of the tenth century AD and the first literary information about it dates back to the thirteenth century. Stepanos Orbelyan, an Armenian historian, says that the swaying Gavazan was a source of fear even to the Seldjuk conquerors, who having ruined the monastery, did not dare to touch the pillar.

The secret of the pillar remained a mystery for a long time. It was only recently that it was unravelled by a team of scientists. The foundation and the basic stage of the pillar are made, to all appearances, from a stone monolith. But this is not the case. The pillar is separated from the foundation and behaves rather like one of those toys that cannot be knocked over. The toy returns to its initial posi-

tion when you push it sideways because it is weighted at the bottom and therefore has a low centre of gravity. Gavazan is a similar case. It swayed at the joining of the upper and lower parts of the pedestal because the foundation was hewn in the shape of a gently sloping sphere, with a hole through the centre. Thanks to this the sphere rests not on a single point, but on the foundation circumference. The pillar could not be dislodged from its foundation except by a force which could both raise the pillar, weighing over eight tons, and move it to one side. Such a force destroyed the mechanism of the pillar—an earthquake in 1931.

The pillar, a marvellous edifice of an anonymous architect, has survived to the present day, but other swaying edifices—the Galitsky pillar crowned with an eagle and the swaying cross at the top of St Sophia Cathedral in Kiev—have gone. They apparently had similar mechanisms.

Simplicity and Genius

There is another miraculous structure in the nature of Gavazan built by the architects of antiquity. The famous minarets of the Isfahan mosque have a cubic foundation, with the cube developing into a cylinder, and the minarets taper off into little spired towers. If you go to the upper platform of one of the minarets and sway it, the other minaret will start swaying in unison. Why? The answer to this mystery has not been discovered yet. It would be easy to dismount the minarets and discover the cause, but the Government of Iran will not agree to it—the memory of the specialists who dismounted the furnace of one of the ancient steam baths, but could not restore it, is too fresh.

Scientists assume that the Isfahan minarets are linked below with wooden sections concealed in rows of brick masonry. The wooden links and thick seams of an elastic solution could convey the rocking motion from one part of the building to another. The design of the swaying minarets is probably just as simple as Gavazan. Yet this simplicity shows the great genius of these architects of antiquity.

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the other hand, Tacitus utilised a Christian source, then to say that his evidence attests Jesus' actual historical existence is to beg precisely the question at issue.

It is at this stage of the argument that the assumptions we make about the text in Tacitus become crucial. Professor G. A. Wells, in his crisply argued exposition of the mythicist view, *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, doubts whether there could have been "a great multitude" of Christians at Rome as early as 64. He surmises that Tacitus may have confused the Christians of his own day with the messianic Jews of Nero's time. In addition, the Neronian persecution is not mentioned in the New Testament, which affords grounds for thinking that it was not part of the early Christian tradition. This latter argument, however, does not hold water. The Epistle of Clement, written at Rome around the year 96, explicitly mentions the death of Paul, together with the persecution of a "vast multitude" of the elect; as we know that the trial of Paul took place in Rome under Nero, this can only refer to the pogrom initiated at that time, not to the subsequent persecution of the Christians under Domitian.

Nor is it tenable that Tacitus could have confused the

Christians of Nero's reign with the Jews. The first point to notice is that, by Hadrian's time, the difference between Judaism and Christianity was clearly recognised in official circles. The Jews had fought savagely against Roman occupation of the Holy Land in the disastrous war of 66-70, rose twice more in the reign of Trajan, and in the year 132 launched a revolt of such dimensions in Judaea that Roman military prowess was taxed to the utmost to overcome it. By contrast, Trajan's correspondence with Pliny attests that, as late as 112, there was no official mode of procedure against the Christians, even though the profession of the new faith was technically illegal. Trajan counsels moderation in dealing with the Christians, and Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius (138-161) actually prohibited their persecution. What this suggests is that Rome did not, at the time of the *Annals*, regard Christianity as a threat to national security, as Judaism certainly was. We may legitimately infer, then, that Tacitus was unlikely to ascribe to Christianity the violently anti-Roman predisposition of messianic Judaism. And by the second century AD, the pacific doctrines of Paul had triumphed over the original Jewish Christians, so that Christianity could no longer be even partially identified with the anti-Roman movement.

FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2; Freethinker officer, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. **Glasgow:** Clyde Books, 292 High Street. **Brighton:** Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Empire Grill, North Street, Brighton, Saturday 20 November, 7 p.m. Annual Dinner. Tickets £1.10 from Mrs Pariente, 97 Valley Drive, Brighton, or Mr Millard, 142 Western Road, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, Telephone: 01-642 8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 21 November, 6.30 p.m. Paul Maret: "China, a New Society".

Merseyside Humanist Group, Royal Institution, Colquitt Street (off Bold Street), Liverpool, Saturday, 20 November, 9.45 a.m.—5.30 p.m. Symposium on Sex Education. Tickets 50p (lunch, 40p extra) from Marion Clowes, 26 Speedwell Drive, Barnston, Wirral L60 2SZ (enclose stamped, addressed envelope).

Merseyside Humanist Group, City High School, Queen's Park, Chester, Saturday, 27 November, 2.30 p.m. Sex Education Seminar. Film: *Growing Up*. Discussion led by Mary Whitehouse and a representative of the Institute of Sex Education and Research. Tickets 30p from Marion Clowes, 26 Speedwell Drive, Barnston, Wirral LS0 2SZ (enclose stamped, addressed envelope).

North Staffordshire Humanist Group, Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley, Friday, 26 November, 7.45 p.m. Malcolm Clarke: "The Humanist in Politics".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 21 November, 11 a.m. T. F. Evans: "The Poet as Legislator". Tuesday, 23 November, 7 p.m. Brian Snelgrove: "Social Circles and Neighbourhood".

NEWS

CHURCH SCHOOLS CRITICISED

"The community pays for Church schools but has little control over them", said Patricia Knight, secretary of Croydon Humanist Society on Wednesday. She was speaking at a meeting which had been organised in the town as part of the campaign for secular education.

Mrs Knight continued: "Far from withering away, the Church schools are becoming more deeply embedded in the educational system. They carry on systematic indoctrination; they were founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century, not for philanthropic reasons as their supporters would like us to believe, but to keep the working class in order in a period of revolutionary upheaval. Their aims have not changed much since! Church schools in Croydon describe their objectives as 'character building' to produce 'Christian citizens' . . . 'a sound moral code based on Anglican principles'. It is easy to see that they aim to turn out a silent majority approving of censorship, authoritarian morality and festivals of light.

"We are equally against Religious Instruction in State schools. At present the churches are frantically trying to rehabilitate RI. With the addition of a little comparative religion, and even a few humanist ideas, RI becomes moral education. They hope to present a new trendy version of 'religious education' which would be compulsory and from which there would be no opting out. This would be taught by RI teachers for the most part, many of them trained at the religious colleges of education which carry on the indoctrination started in the Church schools. Unless we are clear about our objectives, the next education act will include in place of RI compulsory moral education with Christianity as the centrepiece. We must oppose all religion in education. There is no reason why religion should have a special place in education at all, any more than any other philosophy. Religion can perfectly well be discussed in social studies lessons or history lessons.

"It is not enough to criticise the churches as organisations, but leave religious attitudes alone. The church schools base their claim to exist on the truth and superiority of Christianity. This must be challenged by showing that religion is based on myth, it is irrational and it offers no solution to social problems. Religion in Northern Ireland is used to distract attention from political and economic solutions. Our demands should be: no more public money for the Church schools, conversion of church schools into county schools, and secular education in all county schools."

THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

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S AND NOTES

INQUIRY CALLED FOR BY AUTHOR

The *Freethinker* recently published an interview with the parents and sister of Derek Bentley, a 19-year-old feeble-minded, illiterate Londoner who was executed in 1953 for the killing of a policeman. The policeman was shot some time after Bentley was arrested and his 16-year-old companion, Christopher Craig, was sentenced to be detained. He was kept in prison for 10½ years. David Yallop has now produced evidence in a book, *To Encourage the Others*, which he claims establishes a prima facie case with regard to the innocence of both Bentley and Craig.

David Yallop says that the bullet (allegedly fired by Craig) which killed Police Constable Miles, was never produced at the trial. Dr David Halperin, the pathologist who performed the post mortem operation on PC Miles, formed the opinion that the fatal bullet was between .32 and .38 calibre. Craig's .455 Eley could not possibly have fired such a bullet. This evidence was not laid before the Old Bailey jury. The author declares that on all the available evidence there can be little doubt that armed policemen had taken up positions and opened fire prior to the death of PC Miles. This has never been revealed before.

Derek Bentley was an epileptic. Tests performed on him at the age of 17 years, indicated an IQ of 66 and a mental age of nine. The Brixton Prison Medical Officer's report to the Old Bailey stated that Bentley was (a) sane, (b) fit to plead to the indictment, (c) fit to stand his trial. At least two of these conclusions are totally refuted by Bentley's medical history. Shortly before Bentley's execution, Professor Sir Denis Hill wished to make public the fact that Bentley was an epileptic. The Home Office refused to give Sir Denis permission, stating that to make such information public "was not in the public interest".

Analysis of the trial, particularly of the summing-up of Lord Goddard in which he dealt with the defence case in little more than two minutes out of a total of 45 minutes, strongly indicates that the trial of Craig and Bentley was a mistrial. Police evidence at the trial was contradictory in many crucial places. The trial judge, Lord Goddard, did not deem it fit to comment on this at any stage. Three policemen were near the roof, or with Bentley, at vital moments during the battle. They never gave depositions nor evidence at the trial. There were members of the public in close proximity to the rooftop who would have heard the remark that hanged Bentley "let him have it, Christ" had it been uttered as the Prosecution alleged. They were not called to give evidence at the Old Bailey. Christopher Craig has insisted to the author of *To Encourage the Others* that, during the course of the rooftop battle, Bentley was sent over by the police, to persuade Craig to surrender. This evidence was not laid before the Old Bailey jury.

Lord Goddard publicly stated that Bentley's guilt was less than Craig's. Why was the Judge's opinion totally ignored by the then Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe? Sir David also omitted to consult Lord Goddard before denying Bentley a reprieve. This was a breach of standard procedure. The Royal Prerogative of Mercy was

invariably invoked by a succession of Home Secretaries where there was "a scintilla of doubt". In Bentley's case, despite very great doubt. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe withheld that Mercy. The basis upon which the Appeal Judge rejected Bentley's second ground of Appeal, was wholly and totally wrong. In an interview with the author, Lord Goddard declared, "Yes, I thought Bentley was going to be reprieved. He certainly should have been. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind. Bentley should have been reprieved".

David Yallop told the *Freethinker* that the publication of *To Encourage the Others* marks the start of a campaign for a public inquiry into the Bentley/Craig case.

INDEPENDENT

Sir Alan Herbert, who died last week aged 81, will be remembered as a playwright and satirist who also fought with much energy for a wide range of social reform. As the Independent Member for Oxford University he carried the battle into the House of Commons where he achieved an outstanding triumph in steering his Matrimonial Causes Act on to the statute book. He did so without Government help, and in the face of bitter opposition from religious pressure groups and church leaders.

APH, as he was widely known, was one of those rare birds — an Independent who was genuinely independent. Unfortunately the credibility of politicians who describe themselves as independents has practically vanished during the last 20 years. Generally speaking they are too extreme in their views to be acceptable to the Conservative or Labour Party, and the virtual dominance of the Commons by the two big parties has meant that the chances of a non-party candidate becoming an MP are very remote. The practice of Conservative candidates describing themselves as "Independent", "Ratepayers" or "Progressive" candidates in local election has greatly increased public suspicion towards non-party candidates.

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PUBLIC LECTURES

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BOOKS

THE MISERY OF CHRISTIANITY by Joachim Kahl.

Translated by N. D. Smith. Penguin Books, 35p.

This is the book of a young and angry man. The author, having graduated in Theology at the University of Marburg with a thesis on the work of a leading German liberal theologian, left the Church in 1967 at the age of 26 and embarked on a second course of study at the University of Frankfurt, where he specialised in philosophy, sociology and political sciences. The present book, from which an extract was published in the *Freethinker* for 6 November, was published originally in Germany in 1968. It is a sustained and powerful polemic against both the doctrines and the ethic of Christianity—written, as the author frankly states, in the hope that it may contribute to “alienating readers from Christianity by bringing about a diffused sense of uneasiness in the minds of a number of them”. It should certainly have this effect on such Christians as read it through!

Dr Kahl is typically German in his crudition and thoroughness, and also in the fact that he draws almost entirely on German sources—in his formidable bibliography of some 350 titles all but 14 are German. This is to some extent a limitation, but it provides a useful corrective to any tendency to insularity on this side of the channel. Most of the writers included in the bibliography are contemporary liberal theologians—a few, such as Bultmann and Tillich, of international reputation, but the majority little known outside their own country. Having so recently freed himself from their influence, Dr Kahl is understandably still much preoccupied with these writers, and in the section of his book entitled “Irrationality in Theology” he lays into them with zest. German theologians, it would appear from his account, are more given to falling out with and denouncing one another than their English counterparts, but apart from this they show the same tendencies towards double-talk, meaningless verbiage, and a determined attempt to find “symbolic” interpretations of the more inconvenient statements in the Gospels—interpretations that are usually about as convincing as the earlier “symbolic” interpretation of the Song of Solomon as a hymn to the perfections of the Church.

However, in England now (things may be different in Germany) liberal Protestant apologetic is scarcely a force to be reckoned with; it is not taken seriously except by the apologists themselves. The main obstacles to the spread of secularism today are, first, the Catholic Church with its unbending dogmatism; and, second, the vague feeling among ordinary non-Catholics that though Christian doctrines may be hard to believe, Christian ethics are beyond criticism.

There is still a widespread belief that Christianity has been a great force for good throughout history. But Dr Kahl, needless to say, will have none of this. He deals unsparingly with Christianity's historical record—its intolerance and obscurantism, the torrents of blood shed in its Crusades and sectarian quarrels, its atrocious cruelty towards unbelievers and heretics, its witch-hunting and its condonation of slavery. Much of this material will be familiar to those who have read such classics as Lecky's *History of European Morals*, but there is also much that is new, at all events to the present reviewer—in particular a quite hair-raising anti-Semitic quotation from Martin Luther on pp. 58-9.

FREETHINKER

Dr Kahl deals equally effectively with the Church's more recent history. On the claim that the German churches offered a heroic resistance to Hitler he has this to say:

From the very beginning of the Nazi period until its end in 1945, the churches gave ideological support to Hitler in all essential questions. Their protests in the so-called “struggle of the churches”, which we now regard as heroic, referred, with the single exception of the churches' opposition to the Nazi programme of euthanasia, exclusively to Hitler's religious policy, which aimed at the curtailment of the churches' privileges . . . The churches did *not* protest against the suppression of constitutional democracy or of freedom of the press and of speech and the freedom to hold public meetings. They did *not* protest against the countless judicial murders committed against liberals and communists. They did *not* protest against the concentration camps, which were set up as early as 1933. They did *not* protest against the invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union . . . What is more, unless a few, isolated charitable actions, such as the work of Pastor Grüber, are blown up to the size of nationwide movements, the churches did not oppose the Jewish policy of the Nazis. On the contrary, the new laws relating to the Aryanisation of the German nation were simply accepted by the churches and often administered by functionaries in the churches (pp 60-1).

The standard Christian reply to all this is to say that Christianity cannot be blamed for the misdeeds of the churches—that the purity of the Gospel message has been corrupted by its human exponents. But Dr Kahl will have none of this either. “All the crimes”, he says uncompromisingly, “that have been committed by Christians throughout the history of their religion are to be found in embryo in the New Testament” (p 98). And he then goes on to launch an all-out attack on the Gospel ethic, with its other-worldliness, its mixture of ferocity and masochism, its obsession with sin and guilt, its glorification of suffering and sacrifice for their own sake, and its morbid aversion from sex. This is the boldest and most original part of the book. For secularists with a taste for controversy it provides a veritable arsenal of material, and no reader of the *Freethinker* can afford to miss it.

There are the inevitable minor criticisms to be made—three in particular. First, Dr Kahl appears to find nothing good in Jesus' ethical teaching, whereas it would surely be more reasonable to accept the good elements, such as the emphasis on love and human brotherhood, but to point out that these were not originated by Jesus but were to be found in Stoicism and Epicureanism as well as in contemporary Jewish teaching. Second, and more surprisingly, there are certain points at which Dr Kahl's indictment of Christianity could have been even more powerful than it is. For example, when in the course of his historical survey he deals with the Church's attitude towards slavery he confines himself mainly to slave-owning by the mediaeval monasteries. He says little about negro slavery, which was condoned by the churches for centuries, and he does not attempt to refute the outrageous claim, which is still often made, that the abolition of slavery was primarily due to Christians. Finally, when he is quoting, often with devastating effect, from the fathers of the Church, he scarcely ever gives a primary source-reference; his references are usually of the form “quoted by so-and-so”.

However, these are minor criticisms. The book as a whole can scarcely fail to make a powerful impact. Dr Kahl is an invaluable new recruit to militant secularism, and his next broadside will be awaited with eagerness.

MARGARET KNIGHT

REVIEWS

THEATRE

ROBERT OWEN. Unity Theatre, London.

FAITH HEALING

by Louis Rose. Penguin Books, 30p.

Among many of the less sophisticated religious sects the healing efficacy of prayer and the laying on of hands is a basic belief. "Miraculous" cures are frequently reported in the Press, backed by evidence unverifiable by the reader. *Faith Healing* is the record of an unbiased investigation by a doctor, prefaced by a useful short history of the subject. In only one respect does Dr Rose agree with what he calls "uncritical adherents of faith healing"; the phenomenon is sufficiently common to merit serious study. If validated, faith healing could mean the saving of millions of pounds yearly on drugs and hospitalisation. Otherwise it is "at best a waste of time, and at worst a conscious or unconscious deception which might influence sufferers to neglect orthodox medical treatment". Particularly, one might add, where symptoms are relieved without influencing the underlying pathology.

Dr Rose notes that earlier researchers found difficulty in obtaining concrete facts from faith healers who had indicated willingness to be examined. He, too, is still waiting for case histories promised by some of Britain's best-known practitioners. Suggestibility, he learned from personal experience, is heightened when one is a member of a faith healer's mass audience. On one such occasion he was asked to agree that a "spastic" about to be treated was a genuine case. Just in time, he remembered he had not examined the patient. As "cure" followed "cure", it was possible to sense the emotion being generated in the audience, including of course the waiting patients.

Emotion, closely linked with suggestibility, is at the root of most, if not all, so-called miracle cures. Dr Rose knows this, of course, and he lists the "stress diseases" most likely to benefit from psychotherapy, as suggestion is called when put on a rational basis. The mechanics of psychotherapy, too, are gradually becoming known. Adrenalin, for instance, is released into the blood-stream under the influence of emotion. So, possibly, are other therapeutic agents.

Some illnesses miraculously cured may have been wrongly diagnosed, or have undergone temporary remission coinciding with a visit to a faith healer, who naturally gets the credit. Often such cases suffer a relapse worse than before the visit. Other cures might result from the delayed action of orthodox treatment. It is doubtful if the word "miracle" should be used at all in this context, faith cures being demonstrably limited in scope and therefore subject to natural law.

Dr Rose began his investigation, not as a sceptic, but in the hope that there might be "something behind it all". He concludes: "... I have been unsuccessful. After nearly 20 years of work I have yet to find one miracle cure". Applying the test of Occam's Razor, he has rationally disposed of every type of faith cure yet reported. Even so, he does not feel that the last word has been said. In view of his own criteria, it is not easy to imagine what could possibly satisfy him. Perhaps we shall yet see an artificial limb hanging among the crutches at Lourdes!

R. J. CONDON

Presenting Robert Owen on the stage is a formidable undertaking. For one thing, his life was intellectually rather than dramatically exciting. For another, it ended in ostensible failure. In a broad perspective it may be argued that his slogan "the character of man is made for him, not by him" (though often misapplied by both his followers and himself) is the most valuable insight in all moral philosophy; that factory acts, infant schools and co-operative stores slowly appeared on lines suggested by him; and that secularism has elaborated and perpetuated his viable teachings. His immediate projects, however, collapsed about his ears. New Lanark disintegrated physically and, by all accounts, morally when he left it; his attempt to overcome craft jealousies and unite the working classes in a mammoth trade union came to nothing and, despite the subsequent formation of the TUC, has stayed at nothing; his "rational religion" has proved a sad dead end that few have found either rational or religious; in his later years he turned to the nastier dead end of spiritualism; above all, his "utopian" communities, on which he set his heart and most of his fortune, were a prototype of unmitigated disaster. Probably secretly aware but refusing to acknowledge that these repeated failures might have something to do with faults in his theories rather than the failures of his contemporaries to listen to him, most of his long life appears, in the retrospect of his writings, to consist of inflated assertions and hectoring diatribes. To some extent this was true of all the nineteenth-century reformers, perhaps of reformers at all periods. But I must confess that, after making every allowance, I cannot find him likeable.

James R. Gregson, Arnold Hinchliffe and Declan Mulholland, respectively writer, adapter and director, have infused life into this perhaps unpromising material, while at the same time preserving a basic authenticity by using contemporary quotes and projecting slides of original etchings. A few members of the audience sniggered at eulogies to Owen as if they came from the overwriting of the dramatist, whereas this was the stock-in-trade of editorial leaders and functions devoted to the "social father". But we have come to expect from Unity gratuitous tributes to the working classes, and I wonder if the reformed layabouts who were depicted as Owen's retainers were based on historical fact. Too often the Owenites failed to add to their moral insight that of the Jesuits, that the character of man is largely made in the first six years of life. But characters in this chronicle-play were made to voice the chief misgivings about Owen: that he had a paternalistic view of the world and that some of his apprentices, made to work during the day to provide the profits to satisfy his partners and finance his pet schemes, might well have preferred to relax at night rather than gain academic learning. To minimise the failures and the bitterness these brought, in this production the final years of his life were severely telescoped; but there was no false note of triumph at the end.

Ron Bevan captured well the self-confidence and subtle personnel management of the leading character, and in the last act showed as much of the bitterness and disillusion as the script allowed. Among the many minor characters who appeared in revealing vignettes throughout the early years, there was universal enthusiasm though mixed achievement in the cast. Particularly effective were Colin Semel, Charles Blackmore and Sandi Capon.

DAVID TRIBE

LETTERS

Education or Cultivation?

You report Barbara Smoker in her address, *Is Democracy Possible—or Desirable?* as asking how political enlightenment of the electorate is to be achieved since compulsory education for all from the age of five to fifteen years has failed so dismally.

I submit that no person attending school or college is educated. He or she is certainly cultivated to conform to the Establishment, to emerge a profitable unit of production and source of profit and an asset to capitalist society. Human considerations are submerged as far as safely practical. Compulsory education is a complete misnomer; compulsory cultivation would be a more accurate description.

The Education Acts have been resounding successes for the manipulators of society. Five per cent of the populace still own 50 per cent of the national wealth: exactly the same situation that prevailed a hundred years ago. HORACE FAIRHURST.

Ancestor Worship

I wish we could leave "W. S. Ross and Charles Bradlaugh lying peacefully in freshly scrubbed graves", and had no intention of entering the current controversy until Stewart Ross' highly misleading references to my biography of Bradlaugh made this inevitable. It is extraordinary that the biographer of one party in a historical dispute should be accused of bias by a relative of the other. For if there is an institution more ancient than "the true nineteenth-century freethought tradition" it is surely ancestor-worship.

It is simply untrue that "virtually all the reviewers" of my book consider my critical faculties withered by adulation of its subject. Though the small minority of critics who have made this claim—notably Margaret Cole and Malcolm Muggeridge—have made much of it, no one has produced any solid evidence. It is not enough to assert that I admire Bradlaugh. There is, I know, a modern cult, popularised by Lytton Strachey and literary gossip writers, which decrees that a biography is an exercise in instant bitchiness designed to demonstrate the supposed cleverness of the author rather than the actual achievement of his subject. While I am happy to use twentieth-century insights taken from Freud and other psychologists and *montage* effects derived from the cinema, those readers who believe that I see my book in the Victorian biographical tradition of sound scholarship combined with *rapport* are assuredly right. It is true that I admire Bradlaugh. Why the hell should I waste so much of my time if I didn't? But this is because on objective grounds he was, by the criteria of his times, admirable. I also think that trendy moderns have jettisoned these criteria precipitately—but that is another story.

Yet, suppose I were prejudiced in his favour. Why should I want to do down "Saladin"? As it happens, whenever I am asked to recommend nineteenth century freethought writers I always include him. At his best he was a brilliant satirist, a much better stylist than Bradlaugh. Factually however W. S. Ross is not to be relied on, especially in matters concerning himself. To put it bluntly he was something of a cad. The evidence Stewart Ross gives of Johnson's involvement in the libellous *Life* of Bradlaugh (which, with the exception of the letter in the *Agnostic Journal*, for whose existence I am grateful to Mr Ross for calling attention, I give in my biography) is hardly germane. No one has ever named "Saladin" as the author, merely the instigator, of the libel. If the story of Johnson—a man with a questionable background—and his daughter is correct (one does not need to assume it is a forgery to question it), why did he use Charles R. Mackay (an undoubted Ross *protégé*) as his front instead of publishing the book in his own name? Why did Ross pay £225 to Mackay? Why, when Bradlaugh sued Ross for libel, did he pay Bradlaugh's costs and £50 to the Masonic Boys' School to get the action withdrawn? These are not yarns invented by me, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner or anyone else, but are verifiable from solicitors' letters and contemporary court reports, to say nothing of the pamphlets written by Ross' erstwhile cronies after a number of beautiful friendships came to a speedy end. DAVID TRIBE.

Class Society

Pat Sloan is quite right (*Freethinker*, 6 November). I was wrong to say in my review that the communist triumph of 1917 meant the *instant* abolition of class society in Russia, for Marxist theory talks about the *transitional* stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat after the revolution, whose purpose it would be to suppress any counter-revolutionary move by the bourgeoisie. Still, how long this transitional phase was likely to last is not really all that important. Far more disturbing to rational humanists are the additions to the basic Marxist theory grafted on by Lenin, reflected in his subsequent practice, and now incorporated into the canon of Marxist doctrine. As the bourgeoisie had to be physically eliminated as a class, Lenin calls in his writings for the "fiercest and most violent war" demanding "the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule which is unrestricted by any laws". The dictatorship of the party in Russia which was the outcome infringed, and still infringes, the democratic ideals of Marx himself. This divergence between the original expectations of Marx and the existing situation in Russia was frankly admitted by Stalin in 1930 to be "contradictory"; but nonetheless the Marxist dialectic was invoked to justify the immense growth in the power of the State by the need to abolish it. I prefer to call nonsense by its name, and have done with it.

Pat Sloan further accuses me of distorting Lenin's views on public administration. I can only suggest he reads Lenin's *State and Revolution*. There he will find the most absurdly superficial theory of government ever put forward. According to Lenin, even the interim period of proletarian dictatorship would not require a complex apparatus of police, bureaucracy and parliament. All the various financial and economic activities essential to any society would more or less run themselves. Technicians and experts would willingly knuckle down to work, "obeying"—be it noted—the "armed workers". But what the early enthusiasm of the Bolsheviks led to, as the experiments in moneyless accounting ground to a halt in economic chaos, was Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921, which heralded the progressive concentration of power in the hands of the state. The enlargement of wage differentials, the enhancement of the power and prestige of the once-despised bourgeois "experts", and the imposition of rigidly severe industrial discipline, were all to follow. So it is that Bukharin's "indications" became Soviet "dictates". It is not accidental.

It's true, of course, that you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. But if history shows that your omelets burn up in the pan, then there's something wrong with your cooking.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF.

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