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POLITICAL PRISONERS: INTERROGATION OR TORTURE?

The Government's decision to ban the use of "special techniques of intensive interrogation" in Northern Ireland and elsewhere deserves two cheers. Only two because matters should never have been allowed to slide down to a level where a public disavowal of this type became necessary. The authorities have, in fact, rather deserved the response they got from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association: "If tortures do not exist, why ban them now?"

Lord Gardiner, in the Minority Report of the Parker Tribunal, has rightly laid the blame for "this sorry story, if blame there must be", upon "those who many years ago decided that in emergency conditions in colonial-type situations we should abandon our legal, well tried and highly successful wartime interrogation methods and replace them by procedures which were secret, illegal, not morally justifiable, and alien to the spirit of what I believe still to be the greatest democracy in the world". Elsewhere he stated: "The planning of the interrogation centre in Northern Ireland began in March 1971. There was ample time to train a team of interrogators in our . . . wartime [1939-1945] methods. I am not persuaded that substantially as much information [as was obtained by "hooding" and other techniques] might not have been obtained by these methods".

Torture may not Extract the Truth

The wartime methods alluded to involved keeping captives in humane, reasonable conditions; questioning them for long periods, but subtly, and then carefully sifting through and matching up everything they said. Such methods were often "snide", involving deception, bluff, stool-pigeons, and bugging devices, but they obtained results, and usually the truth. The latter is not always obtained by barbarities such as sensory deprivation (hooding, noise machines, etc.), depriving the prisoner of sleep or inducing diarrhoea with drugs, or by straightforward physical thuggery as used by the Nazis. Innocent men are not unknown to "confess" under torture.

The end, some would have us believe, justifieth the means. Does it? If we are involved in a war of total extermination, without mercy or compromise, then it matters not if prisoners are killed or psychologically maimed by torture, or what the long-term social damage is: nor

whether the victors, in becoming themselves utterly brutalised, are consequently despised by decent men and women. But if we pose as the defenders of democratic government, of law and human decency; as the champions of a just and humane society, what then? Surely torture can gain us only a Pyrrhic and obscene victory. Necessary as it may well be, at times, to resort to force of arms for *our* cause; ends nevertheless may rightly be judged by the means employed in attempting to secure them.

FORCIBLE FEEDING

The detention and recent release of Miss Judith Todd in Rhodesia has raised the old issue of whether forcible feeding of hunger-strikers is justifiable. One would have thought that the historical lesson of the suffragettes and the "Cat and Mouse" Act would have sufficed to render this practice abhorrent to reasonable people, but apparently not. A few days ago a doctor upheld the use of forcing feeding where the subject was so malnourished that acetone was being excreted into the urine.

Oh, it is always the "extreme case" is it not? The fact is that forcible feeding by tube is both dangerous (it may cause death by suffocation or shock) and painful. Such a technique used on a conscious victim amounts to nothing less than torture, no matter what the "circumstances", and medical men who participate in these practices are unworthy of the profession which they so prostitute. Artificial feeding is justifiable if a hunger striker lapses into unconsciousness as the subject is no longer able to exercise choice over his or her continued fasting; but the use of practices such as forcible feeding should have died out with the Inquisition, the rack and the treadmill.

HAMLET WITHOUT THE PRINCE: JESUS AND THE MYTHICISTS*

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

* A reply to Professor Wells (*The Freethinker*, 15 January 1972) and Robert Morrell (18 December 1971).

Professor Wells has written a most vigorous and scholarly critique of my *Freethinker* article on the myth theory of Christian origins, and I agree with much of what he has said—without, however, always drawing similar conclusions. On the other hand, where Mr. Morrell diverges from Professor Wells' version of the theory, his criticisms to me seem insubstantial and his logic faulty. To deal with Mr. Morrell first:

(a) The Trial of Paul

The narrative in Acts tells how Paul was brought before the Roman procurator of Judaea, Festus, following his arrest in Jerusalem. As a Roman citizen, Paul elects for trial in Rome. On his arrival there, he is imprisoned for two years awaiting trial. As is well known, Acts ends abruptly at this point without mentioning the result of the trial, for whatever reason, so that we are compelled to rely on Christian tradition. This supports the martyrdom of Paul during a persecution, and so the problem is to determine the likely date of this attack on the faithful. What matters, first of all, is dating the arrival of Paul in Rome. As Festus took command in Judaea at some point in the late 50's, and Nero ruled from A.D. 54 to A.D. 68, it is reasonable to suppose that Paul's trial, if it took place, occurred under Nero. The Epistle of Clement mentions the death of Paul during a persecution, and the evidence of Tacitus and Suetonius is that Nero ordered a witch-hunt of the Christians in Rome in 64. There is no record of any other persecution of the Christians until the somewhat doubtful one of Domitian (81-96), which is in any case much too late for the death of Paul. Nor is there anything to support the idea that the Romans might have let Paul escape trial permanently, so I would argue that the evidence supports mainstream New Testament criticism in locating the trial of Paul in Rome during the reign of Nero.

(b) The Evidence of Tacitus

Mr. Morrell makes great play of the fact that there were unlikely to be many Christians at Rome as early as 64, which in his view invalidates the evidence of Tacitus and Suetonius. Not at all, for whether there were only a few hundred or many thousands of Christians at Rome is irrelevant. What matters is that both Tacitus and Suetonius refer to the persecution under Nero as specifically directed against the *Christians*, not the Jews, which raises the thorny problem of just how far the Romans in the first century A.D. distinguished the Christians from Judaism. Wishing to defend his view that Christianity did not separate itself from Judaism until what he calls a "much later stage", Mr. Morrell not only does not tell us when this later stage was; he also quite fails to appreciate the very complex problem here, for he seems unaware of the two distinct strands in Christian doctrine and practice of the first century A.D., the Jewish-Christian element and the Pauline element, which took sharply opposed views on what the correct attitude to Judaism should be.

Mr. Morrell is hopelessly wrong in suggesting that the last part of Tacitus' famous reference to Jesus in his "Annals" implies that he sympathised with the Christians

as *Christians*, which in Mr. Morrell's fantasy world means that the whole passage was anyway interpolated by some pious Christian scribe. Tacitus was not inhuman, and any sympathy he may have felt for the Christians stemmed from the barbarity of Nero's persecution, as an impartial reading of the text will confirm. To maintain that the passage in Tacitus is a forgery is to stretch credulity to its utmost, and at least Professor Wells freely admits that the reference is genuine. There is a text in Josephus, universally conceded to be a Christian interpolation, that paints a glowing picture of the faith and its founder; so why should any Christian insert a passage in Tacitus that described his faith as a pernicious superstition? There comes a point when the commonsense interpretation of a disputed text hardly needs defending against the increasingly fanciful and totally unsupported concoctions of the mythicists.

The Mythical Jesus of Prof. Wells

Professor Wells' argument falls into four parts:

1. The early Christian documents, other than the gospels, represent Jesus as a god, not a human figure. In particular, Paul had no clear idea of when it was that Jesus was supposed to have walked the earth, and so his conviction that Jesus, risen from the dead, had recently appeared to him is a mystical revelation that cannot be shown to have a solid historical basis. It derived instead from the interplay of Paul's temperament and the pagan mystery cults of the time, which inspired the idea of a suffering and dying redeemer that was to find a place in Jewish messianic thought.
2. The tradition that the saviour-god Jesus died by crucifixion is to be explained on three grounds: firstly, that execution, usually by the Roman penalty of crucifixion, was common at that time, and regarded as honourable; secondly, that Paul's visions informed him that his god Jesus had tricked the demonic forces of the universe by suffering an ignominious death at their hands; and thirdly, that Jesus' death by crucifixion was found useful in freeing the gentile converts to Christianity from the yoke of the Jewish Law.
3. As Jesus was a god descended from David, he had to be assigned a definite period in history. Biographical details of Jesus were invented to differentiate him from the pagan gods such as Isis, and his careers on earth was located by Christian writers of the early second century in the first third of the first century A.D. By the turn of the century, there could be few, if any, Christians to report first-hand on Jesus, so his earthly career could not have occurred in the very recent past. If, however, Jesus was to be allotted an earthly life further back in time, it was quite likely to have been in the rule of the Roman procurator, Pilate (A.D. 26-36); for he was "just the type of person to have murdered Jesus". Thus it is that Jesus was linked with Pilate only by writers seventy years later than Pilate.
4. Tacitus' remark that Jesus was executed at the hands of Pilate is to be discounted as solid evidence for a historical Jesus, for Tacitus may simply have been repeating what Christians by then believed about the founder of their faith. Nor is the Epistle of Clement necessarily firm evi-

dence for the persecution of the Christians by Nero, referred to by both Tacitus and Suetonius. For this Epistle does not unambiguously say that the death of Paul and other victims of the persecution all happened at the same time and place.

The Essence of the Matter

Professor Wells' article raises a great many points, and to attempt to deal with them fully would need a book in itself. My principal criticism of his lucid and impressive exposition of the myth theory is that its account of Christian origins is no more plausible than the alternatives which presuppose an historical Jesus, and in some ways is a good deal less plausible. And Professor Wells himself modestly admits on p. 313 of his book, *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, that his suggested reconstruction is merely one of a number of possible alternatives. The essence of the matter is this: we have to choose one of three hypotheses in the study of Christian origins, namely (i) that the orthodox Christian account is correct; (ii) that Jesus was an historical figure later deified by his followers after a cruel and well-nigh incomprehensible death; or (iii) that Jesus is a cult-figure later given human form. The question thus becomes how we set about making this choice, bearing in mind that all our knowledge of Jesus and his mission has been passed down through his followers and hence is subject to the distortion and changes of perspective that are notorious features of the gospel narratives. This means that we can only aim for a degree of probability in constructing a theory of Christian origins, and that in the nature of the case it is not possible to know that Jesus existed in the same sense that we know Julius Caesar existed. It all depends on how you assess the probabilities.

In such an unavoidable welter of speculation, it is just as well that a rough chronology of primitive Christianity can be constructed, which will afford a useful starting point. When Claudius became emperor of Rome in A.D. 41, he released Judaea from direct Roman rule and gave power to the client prince Agrippa. Reversing the policy of the Jewish sanhedrin, Agrippa ordered a persecution of the Christians in which Peter was forced to flee Jerusalem and James, the brother of John, killed. As Agrippa died in 44, we know that the persecution took place sometime between 41 and 44. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul recounts that he visited Jerusalem to confer with the leaders of the Jewish Christian community there three years after his conversion, and again after fourteen years. Now up to the time of Agrippa's persecution, the leaders of the Jerusalem church were James, Peter and John. As this trio was broken up by Agrippa, Paul's conversation with the leaders of the Jerusalem church could not have taken place after 44, and if we count back fourteen years we arrive at 30 for the date of Paul's conversion. Such a date fits in very well with the likely time of the death of Jesus, and at once contradicts Professor Wells' view that Paul was not conversant with the historical Jesus. For if there were active discussions in the middle thirties between Paul and the Jewish Christians, it is surely impossible to imagine that Paul could have emerged from them without a clear notion of just when Jesus had lived and died. And it would help to explain just why it was that Paul was so anxious to differentiate his concept of Christ from that of the Jewish Christians. Paul had violently opposed the Christians before his dramatic conversion; like other Jews, he regarded the Christian notion of a crucified messiah as blasphemous, in view of the Deuteronomic curse on crucified men. Following his conversion, Paul had first of

all to establish his legitimacy as an apostle, as against the immense status and authority of the Jewish Christian apostles, and then to disseminate his own brand of Christology. This he did by preaching that Jesus was a quasi-divine being who had died to save mankind, not just the Jews; and that God's dispensation to him to evangelise the gentiles had invalidated the original Jewish Christian doctrine that the Christian message was to be directed solely to the Jews.

Paul's Concept of Jesus

Professor Wells is right in suggesting that Paul takes a highly mystical view of the crucifixion, and that such an interpretation was current within thirty years of the alleged event. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, written around the year 55, Paul refers to the crucifixion of the "Lord of glory" by the demonic forces that were supposed to rule over the world, and had been deceived by God into carrying out his divinely ordained plan. Paul is here clearly influenced by current Greco-Roman astralism, and Professor Wells is of course absolutely right that the syncretistic mysteries of pagan religion helped to determine Paul's notion of Jesus as a quasi-divine being who died and was resurrected to save us. This fundamentally explains Paul's indifference to the historical Jesus.

However, to infer from all this that the silence of Paul about Jesus' career on earth is "one of the strongest arguments that no such person ever existed" (Wells, p. 120) is both to misunderstand the nature of Paul's teaching and to attempt to extract the kind of conclusion from our source material that my original article argued could not be extracted. It does seem to me that mythicists try to have their cake and eat it, in this sense: if an early Christian writer says little about the historical Jesus, this supports the myth theory; but if, as with evangelists, the early texts say a great deal about Jesus' life on earth, then this is to be explained as an attempt at verisimilitude. Only if the gospels are to be dated comparatively late, at the turn of the century or even after, would such a thesis appear plausible. Yet Professor Wells does not seriously challenge the verdict of most New Testament scholars that the synoptic gospels are all first century creations, and that the earliest (Mark) was written at some time between A.D. 65 and 75, most probably around the time of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Moreover, as the French scholar Guignebert has remarked in discussing Paul and his teaching, the Jesus preached by Paul is a God who has been a man, for otherwise Paulinism is unintelligible. Imbued as he was with the idea of the suffering messiah, Paul identifies this heavenly figure with the crucified Jesus, who performed as a man the decisive act of redemption by his death on the cross. And this is why Paul is not interested in whatever Jesus may have said or preached on earth; for the whole significance of Jesus lay in what he had *done*, namely to conquer death by the resurrection and thereby to witness to the power of his redemptive sacrifice. How else can the conversion of Paul be explained, except on the hypothesis that Paul originally accepted the historical Jesus? For Paul's opposition to the primitive Christian community and its faith in the messiah Jesus (that same opposition which melted away when his visions informed him that the crucified and therefore disgraced Jesus was in fact the messiah appointed by God) naturally presupposes that

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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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.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

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

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

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.

Freethought History and Bibliography Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 11 March, 2 p.m.: general meeting; 2.45 p.m.: J. S. L. Gilmour, "Some Freethinkers and Their Writings, I: Epicurus to the Eighteenth Century".

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 12 March, 6.30 p.m.: Alan Bates, "The New Irrationality".

London Young Humanists. Sunday, 12 March, 6 p.m.: meet outside the Academy Cinema, Oxford Street, to see *Family Life*. Thursday, 16 March, 8 p.m.: coffee evening c/o Robert Smith, 38 Gastein Road, London W6.

National Secular Society, The Clarence, Whitehall, London SW1. Friday, 17 March, 8 p.m.: Nigel Sinnott, "Irish Freethinkers".

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NEWS

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S DINNER

This year's N.S.S. Dinner is to be held at the Pavours Arms, Page Street, Westminster, on Saturday, 25 March.

The guest of honour will be HELEN BROOK, founder and chairman of the Brook Advisory Centres. Since the first Brook Centre was started hundreds of young people have received advice and assistance with sexual and emotional problems, making a considerable contribution to community welfare and to the happiness of young people and their families.

A toast to Helen Brook will be proposed by JILL TWEEDIE, whose television appearances and regular column in *The Guardian* have gained for her many admirers.

Other speakers will be GEORGE MELLY, the critic and musician; MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES, co-author of *Sex Education—the Erroneous Zone*; and BARBARA SMOKER, of "Humanist Diary" fame, who will preside.

Tickets, at £1.75 each, should be obtained in advance from the organisers: National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL. [Please state if vegetarian.]

THOMAS PAINE'S BIRTHPLACE PURCHASED

Robert Morrell writes:

Members and supporters of the Thomas Paine Society met at Conway hall, London, on 26 February to discuss the Society's policy in respect of Paine's birthplace in Thetford, and to elect a new Council for the Society.

Addressing the meeting the Chairman of the T.P.S., Christopher Brunel, announced that two days prior to the meeting a member, Mrs. I. G. Brown, had purchased the Paine birthplace for £9,000 and intended to establish a Trust to take it over and maintain it as a memorial to Thomas Paine. Mr. Brunel also announced that Mr. and Mrs. J. Collins would make a gift through the Society of £1,000 to the Trust when it was established.

The new Council of the Thomas Paine Society was elected and will consist of the following: I. Cameron, N. H. Sinnott, G. Miller, Prof. J. F. C. Harrison, A. W. Thomas, Dr. G. A. Daniels, A. A. Rudling, G. Hoile, P. Cadogan, A. W. Francis, H. B. Fry, G. Dunn and Dr. E. P. Thompson.

The secretary, R. W. Morrell, announced that the first Thomas Paine Lecture, recently endowed by two T.P.S. members, Mr. and Mrs. J. Collins, would be given at the University of East Anglia on 23 May by Dr. E. P. Thompson, taking as his subject "The Paineite Underground in England, 1796—1801". The Secretary also announced that Mr. W. W. Hamilton, M.P., had been elected a Vice-President of the society.

NINETY YEARS AGO

"Mother Manning [Cardinal Henry Edward Manning] has contributed to the *Nineteenth Century* 'An Englishman's Protest' against the admission of Mr. Bradlaugh or any other atheist to Parliament . . . The Archbishop's acquaintance with law is extremely limited. He writes about it as Artemus Ward proposed to lecture on Science, with an imagination untrammelled by the least knowledge of the subject . . . What strange notions have these ecclesiastics . . . , they might as well try to chain a lion with cobwebs . . .

S AND NOTES

"It passes my comprehension", says Mother Manning, 'how it can be said that Mr. Bradlaugh is deprived of his legal right.' Well, a great many things may pass his comprehension and still be true. An archbishop's mind is not the measure of all things, least until God Almighty plainly says so."

—G. W. Foote in *The Freethinker*, 12 March 1882.

HIRSUTE HELLAS

Some 150 evening students at a school in Salonika have experienced the blessings of living in the Colonels' concept of "Christian Greece": they have been expelled for wearing their hair long.

One is left with the distinct impression that if the traditional artist's representation of Jesus of Nazareth was to appear in the streets of present-day Athens he would indeed not last more than a few minutes before being dragged off to the dungeons. And as for that awful bohemian, Byron . . . !

EXETER DEVILS' ADVOCATES

Readers may remember that last week we reported that a petition with 4,000 signatures had been the rounds with the object of preventing the Ken Russell film, *The Devils*, being shown at an Exeter cinema. Now we hear that Exeter University students have presented a counter-petition, bearing 2,722 signatures in favour of the film's being shown, to the City Council's Policy Committee as they arrived to see a private screening of the film. The film was "passed" by seven votes to two. The angels are not amused!

Meanwhile, down under in New Zealand, plans are afoot to bring an indecency prosecution against the musical *Hair!*—And I thought *that old thing* was only shown at minors' matinees nowadays, anyway!

AUSTRALIAN BISHOPS MOBILISE

"Christians", say Australia's 35 Catholic Bishops in a statement on Morals and Human Values, "should exercise their democratic right vigorously to resist so-called liberalisation of the existing law, for example, to make civil divorce available at the request of husband and wife, or to make abortion readily available at the request of the mother of the unborn child."

Alan McElwain, writing in the *Catholic Herald* (25 February) says that the bishops "also said that Catholics should not vote for a party favouring easier abortion". Well, that is their privilege, but I hope this intelligence will have some impact upon the bland little brains of the "Don't - knock - the - churches - you're - flogging - a - dead - horse" brigade this side of the globe!

PROFESSOR MOHL'S MISERIES

Everybody, at one time or another, has "one of those weeks"; but for Professor Borman Mohl (the "Robespierre of the Sexual Revolution") the last few days have just been one catastrophe after another.

On Monday he heard that the Department of Health and the Local Authority had vetoed plans for the multi-million pound, 2,500-bed private Superabororium which he

had been planning to build on the side of the Bog Lane Bethesda Primitive Methodist Mission, Kennington.

On Tuesday morning the van carrying the entire stock of Professor Mohl's daring new venture into sex-education publishing, *Scatophilia Weekly*, was hijacked by respectable middle-class members of the Gathering of Gloom and the contents turned out on to a huge bonfire in Embankment Gardens whilst a seventy or eighty-strong crowd of blue-rinsed matrons danced round the flames, brandishing meat cleavers and lengths of hempen rope. The poor old age pensioner who had been driving the van would have been burned too, had not the band in the distance struck up "God Save the Queen", enabling the elderly gentleman to slip away. Thinking that the Gathering of Gloom was composed entirely of evangelical Christians, Prof. Mohl attempted to infiltrate the crowd incognito and rescue some of his stock posing as a journalist, but he had reckoned without Dr. Ilych Hacetmann, whippet breeder, Jungian psychoanalyst and "positive" humanist, who has long been obsessed with convincing Christians that all unbelievers do not spend their time commuting in a methylated spirits haze from V.D. clinic to drug orgy. Recognised and denounced by Dr. Hacetmann, Prof. Mohl was lucky to escape with his life and a few contusions.

On Wednesday morning the hapless Professor found himself pursued round the streets of the metropolis for quarter of an hour by the West Bloomsbury Gay Liberation Guerillas who considered themselves to have been slighted by his mammoth masturbation film epic, *Detumescence*, and so had taken to the streets with placards reading "Mohl go Underground"; "*Detumescence* is heterosexual bourgeois imperialist chauvinism", etc. Just as the Professor's legs were about to give way beneath him, he saw the familiar polystyrene and chromium facade of Humanist House, dashed in, and begged for sanctuary at the feet of His Beatitude Roger Montmorency. Outside the Guerillas gathering menacingly, chanting "Gay is angry!" as they argued among themselves whether or not to storm the building. Suddenly, round the corner came Miss Rosemary Lyttle, only daughter of P.C. Hengist Lyttle (and still the youngest female judo blackbelt in London), and at the sight of this 5½-year-old picture of innocent, doe-eyed, peaches-and-cream complexioned English girlhood, clutching a bag of bullseyes to her bosom, the entire force of Gay Liberation Guerillas ran off, screaming in terror for their lives.

The danger past, Professor Mohl mopped his brow and gratefully gulped down three quarters of the contents of a decanter of sherry that was offered to him. "My God, sweeties", he said to a hastily arranged press gathering, "that was a near escape. A few yards more and I might have suffered a fate worse than death! From now on I'm 'phoning my guru every morning for a horoscope before I leave the house".

FREETHINKER FUND

We wish to thank those readers who so kindly contributed to the Freethinker Fund during February:

- J. Ancliffe, 45p; Anonymous, £1 & 45p; A. G. Bedane, £1; J. G. Burdon, 25p; Mrs. J. B. Coward, 45p; W. V. Crees, 35p; [in memory of] W. D. S. Dunn, £2; G. M. Faulkner, £1.45; W. H. Goodall, £1; Phyllis Graham, £1; Dr. D. Haler, 45p; D. Harper, 45p; J. Jeffery, £1.45; D. C. Johnson, 45p; G. A. Kirk, £1; T. W. Lines, £1.40; John Manus, £1.40; P. J. McCormick, 44p; Earle McGue, £1.40; James McMahon, 10p; D. V. Parker, £1.20; B. B. Pinder, 50p.

HAMLET WITHOUT THE PRINCE

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Jesus actually walked the earth. And the critical passage in the epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:16), in which Paul avows his indifference to the man Jesus, who is to be jettisoned for the risen Christ, makes it clear that Paul is no longer interested in the historical Jesus. Professor Wells ingeniously argues that this text does not necessarily imply that Paul once knew a flesh-and-blood Jesus, but that worldly criteria no longer count in his estimation of the divine Christ. Yet the worldly criteria could only have been those employed by the sceptical Jews against the Christians, as the gospels make clear: that Jesus, crucified by the Romans, could not be the Christ. For Paul, Jesus' resurrection overcame this Jewish objection, and thus abrogated the Torah. So, even if we grant Professor Wells' interpretation of the text in Corinthians, what Paul says here does not, I think, lend support to his inference from it.

A Vast Subject

So far as the problem of the Roman evidence is concerned, this is a vast subject which it would be impossible to compress into a few lines here; I hope to survey some of the issues at stake in the question of the Roman attitude to Christianity, and the reasons for the early persecutions,

in a future *Freethinker* article. Suffice it to say that Professor Wells is correct to suggest that Tacitus' remarks about what Christians believed in his day (c. A.D. 110) are not a reliable guide to what they believed in Nero's time (A.D. 54 to 68). Note, however, Professor Wells' somewhat questionable assumption that Tacitus was simply repeating what contemporary Christians believed about Jesus, rather than drawing on independent information about Christian origins. I argued before that the critical issue here is whether tradition that Jesus died by crucifixion under Pilate could conceivably have emanated either from Jewish-Christian or Pauline myth; and the extreme difficulty of supposing either favours, to my mind, the opposite view that Tacitus was here speaking the truth. I am quite willing, however, to concede that the anti-mythicist case in no way hinges crucially, if readers will pardon the pun, on Tacitus, Suetonius or Pliny. Where the strength of the case (which is, after all, nothing but the overwhelming consensus of New Testament scholars) springs from is the interplay of the sharply opposing elements that we see at work in primitive Christianity; for what this does is allow us to strip away the secretions of myth and reach a bare substratum of historical fact. No comfort to the Christians in this enterprise; for, as Bultmann has observed, we can know hardly anything about Jesus except that he lived, and died on the cross as a rebel against Rome.

MAZZINI, 1805-1872

*O miseri, o codardi
Figliuoli avrai, miseri eleggi.*

"[If] thou needs must bear children to be either unhappy or cowardly; choose then the unhappy."

GIACOMO LEOPARDI (1821).

Giuseppe Mazzini died a hundred years ago on 10 March, and of him Charles Bradlaugh wrote, in a solemn, front-page obituary in *The National Reformer*, "No man has ever impressed us so much". It was an opinion widely shared by romantic liberals throughout Europe at the time.

Mazzini created for himself the legend of liberator or devil, depending upon one's point of view. The son of a university professor, he joined, in 1830, the Italian revolutionary movement of the Carbonari; in 1831 issued the "Manifesto of Young Italy" and after a spell of imprisonment he attempted in 1833 to lead a revolution in Piedmont from Switzerland. In 1837 Mazzini came to London, where he spent many years in strange, lonely exile in dingy lodgings where his only luxuries were "his cup of coffee and cigar". But his finest hour was surely in 1849 when he was called upon to lead the newly-declared Roman Republic in its fight against the French expeditionary force sent at the request of Pope Pius IX. The story of how a makeshift Roman army, generalled by Garibaldi, held out for months against overwhelming odds of French regular forces is one of the great sagas of democratic history. For this writer, at least, it has the same significance as the 1916 Rising to an Irishman, the Siege of the Alamo to a Texan, or the storming of the Bastille to a French republican, all rolled into one.

Even when the battle for Rome militarily, was lost, Mazzini refused to surrender to the French, resigned as a triumvir, and was finally persuaded to return in exile to London. But in its defeat the Roman Republic of 1849

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

kindled the spark of support for Italian unity both at home and abroad, and after the campaigns of 1860 and 1870 the latter became a reality.

"Mazzini, wrote Bradlaugh, "had two great objects, to the achievement of which he dedicated his life. One, the unity of Italy, with Rome as its capital. The other, Italy not only united, but a Republic. He lived to see the first, the Republic will follow all the sooner for his self-sacrificing labours."

Italy has seen many changes since the death of Mazzini; not a few of them for the worse. But the story of Mazzini and Garibaldi, and of the selfless heroism of the men and women of all classes and of many nationalities who willingly followed them—so often to torture and death, is one which deserves to be told and retold around the campfires of liberty for as long as these shall twinkle through the twilight of history. "If", wrote G. M. Trevelyan in 1911, "Mazzini can never be the favourite of historians, he will ever be the favourite of poets." For as the poet Swinburne wrote in his tribute to Mazzini:

*Of God nor man was ever this thing said,
That he could give
Life back to her who gave him, whence his dead
Mother might live.*

*But this man found his mother dead and slain
With fast sealed eyes
And bade the dead rise up and live again,
And she did rise*

*And all the world was bright with her through him:
But dark with strife,
Like heaven's own sun that storming clouds bedim
Was all his life.*

BOOKS

EDUCATION AND POLITICS, 1900-1951. A Study of the Labour Party. By Rodney Barker.

Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, £3.

The first thing that must be said is that this is a work of scholarship. There are over 600 references in the footnotes. No doubt much of it is derived from Dr. Barker's Ph.D. thesis of 1968. It is none the worse for this for he has throughout enlivened his narrative with aptly phrased comment, e.g. chapter VI, "A Distant Prospect of Eton College" in which we are told that "Throughout virtually the whole of the party's MacDonaldian phase from 1900 to 1951, the public schools were secure in their rural seclusion from the vulgar gaze of socialists and proletarians".

In some ways, and especially for those who are "idealists" in politics, this book makes somewhat depressing reading. For it chronicles in painstaking detail the long history of shabby compromise and timid time-serving that seems to be an inevitable concomitant in the growth of any mass political party of the Left. Yet it also shows how the determined effort of quite a few men and women with real convictions can ultimately prevail. The successive Ministers of Education in the 1945-51 Labour Governments, for example, set their faces pretty firmly against the concept of the comprehensive school and indeed rejected plans from local authorities for comprehensive schools, such as that put forward in 1949 by the Labour-controlled Middlesex County Council.

But, by 1951, "the Labour Party was fully and publicly committed for the first time to the comprehensive school" and, of course, less than twenty years later, a Labour Minister of Education was urging local authorities to "go comprehensive" and, indeed, seeking powers to compel recalcitrant ones to fall in line. Indeed, the majority of local authorities by this time, even those with large Conservative majorities, were willing to do so. Over the years, the persistent persuasion of Alice Bacon, W. G. Cove, Margaret Herbison and the National Association of Labour Teachers had triumphed and led to a radical change in the public educational system of this country.

Progress has not been uniform. We are still a long way from Will Thorne's ideal of "a national, free, secular system of education" and it is of interest to note that, as long ago as 1905, J. A. Hobson expressed "a perceptive criticism of the development of selective secondary education" at a meeting in Hanley held during the Trades Union Congress there by the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union (forerunner of the General and Municipal Workers' Union of today).

It is indeed not only the problems of education which make this book both of absorbing interest and real importance. It tells us a lot about the way in which we are governed by political parties through our present system of parliamentary democracy.

To anyone who seeks to reform any part of our national life or to remove injustice and inefficiency from the way in which we are governed, Dr. Barker has much to teach. He shows both the possibilities and the limitations of our democracy.

The evidence in this book proves beyond all doubt that the impatient "revolutionaries" who will have no truck with parliamentary procedures and methods, whilst they may be right in believing they will never achieve a sudden revolution this way, are wholly wrong in believing that major reforms can never be achieved nor be worthwhile

REVIEWS

using "constitutional" methods. Whether, of course, you can get a sudden revolution by any other means is, perhaps, beyond the scope of this review.

There still remains a basic problem, expressed best perhaps by Tawney's trenchant observation—"The tragedy of English education is the tragedy of English social life. It is the organisation of education upon lines of class". Dr. Barker concludes that "the chief hallmark of the first era of the (Labour) party's history seems in the matter of the public schools to be a serious of failures to react to initiatives and challenges". It is, unfortunately, a nettle which, even today, the Labour party seems curiously reluctant to grasp.

The same is true of the "religious issue". From the day in 1911, when a Roman Catholic delegate was howled down at the Trades Union Congress, the idea of secular education has seemed to mark time. Anyone who has served on a local education authority knows the power which the churches can wield to preserve their privileged position in the educational system.

Those who wish to change this will learn much of value from Dr. Barker's book. The virtues we need to secure reform are not righteous indignation and impatient urgency, but rather patience and perseverance. Even so, the basic message is one of hope. Sooner or later the ecclesiastical bastions will crumble away before the quiet, determined reasoning of those who know what they want and how to get it.

J. STEWART COOK

MANUEL. By Hugh Steven. Lakeland, 40p.

THE DRUG BUG.

By Allen Palmquist and Frank Reynolds.

Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 20p.

There are many aboriginal tribes in Mexico, and sad to relate "not one of them has ever heard that freedom from sin comes from faith in Jesus Christ"; that is, until recently. *Manuel* is about the Totonac Indians, and how the New Testament has been translated into their language. Since the Indians can neither read nor write, those responsible for the translations are having perforce to teach them, which at least gives them a better understanding of the white man's world and makes exploitation less easy. The *Manuel* of the title is a Totonac and a missionary who wins the unlikeliest of souls for Jesus, from a Turkish Moslem doctor to a whole platoon of Spanish-Mexican policemen. Although it religiosity is irksome, the book gives a good general picture of the Totonac culture and outlook.

Frank Reynolds is a former director of the Teen Challenge Training Center for drug addicts. Allen Palmquist has worked with addicts and now lectures in high schools and colleges. *The Drug Bug* represents the summary of the US drug scene, which probably differs only in degree from the situation in Britain, and is the short answer to those well-meaning people who think the takink of "soft" drugs should be legalised. Former drugs users tell what really happens on a "trip", and what is more important, afterwards. A "pot" smoker for twenty years calls it "as lethal as rat-poison", leading to "lethargy, indolence, laziness and demoralisation of the mores, norms and values".

(Continued on back page)

(Continued from Previous page)

And all too often to the "hard" stuff, as this pamphlet shows. Teen Challenge is a religious institution, with a "Come to Jesus" therapy which gets results, even if it does have former addicts talking like street-corner evangelists.

R. J. CONDON

LETTERS

Lord Raglan Whispers . . .

You certainly splashed my speech in *The Freethinker* and embarrassed me a little because to say "Lord Raglan speaks" sounds so terribly pompous and weighty and I do not like to think I am either of these things! But I do thank you for showing that at least one member of Parliament has said something about it. I was congratulated by many people afterwards for the "courage" of the speech, but in truth I was so hopping mad at the people who keep quoting Christianity as only a loving and kindly philosophy and refuse to believe that is anything to do with the situation in Ireland, that I thought somebody had to get up and say something.

And yet it shows that there is some value still in the House of Peers. I could not have made a speech like that if I were in the House of Commons for the electors would have been after me. I do think it may have done some good.

RAGLAN.

Humanism and the Environment

I was interested to read that a "Humanist is one who puts human being first" (*The Freethinker*, 26 February). In my opinion this is the attitude which is very largely responsible for the present "environmental crisis". If one believes that all people are entitled to a decent home, enough food, etc., then one can hardly complain when the countryside and wild-life has to be destroyed or exterminated in order to provide these basic necessities!

This, as I see it, poses a problem for humanists which cannot and will not be solved by mere slogans and one-sided thinking.

D. C. TAYLOR.

Religious Education—Doctrinaire or Open-Minded

I readily agree with Gill Boyd that much—maybe most—religious education in schools is doctrinaire and harmful. But not all of it. There is some good, tolerant, open-minded religious education happening. I refer to that kind of religious education which is concerned for the religious (or non-religious) awareness of the child, the exploration of what different kinds of religion are about, the *critical* examination of stories, myths and religious history. This kind of R.I. is a very different proposition from the "today we'll do the creation" variety.

Although not a humanist (though maybe not a Christian either) I support the humanist line of eliminating dogmatic R.I. from our schools. But I am convinced that it is possible to teach R.I. in a much more civilised way and that R.I. *per se* should not undergo blanket condemnation.

(Rev.) JOHN D. ALLERTON, Editor, *The Inquirer*.

Correction

The quotation in last week's comment on "The Aldershot Tragedy" should have read . . . a number of "innocent working class" girls. Miss Devlin's word was "people".

EVENTS (Continued from page 84)

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 12 March. 11 a.m.: Dr. James Hemming, "The Case Against Pessimism"; 3 p.m.: Avro Manhattan and Fred Schmidt, "Catholicism at the Crossroads". Tuesday, 14 March, 7 p.m.: speaker from STOPP, "Violence in Schools".

Thorndyke Theatre, Leatherhead, Surrey. 9-25 March: paintings by Oswell Blakestone and Halima Nalecz.

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Community Centre, Woodhall. Saturday, 11 March, 2.30 p.m.: jumble sale.

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
Religion and Ethics in Schools	David Tribe	7½p	3p
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	12½p	3p
RI and Surveys	Maurice Hill	5p	3p
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	12½p	3p
The Cost of Church Schools	David Tribe	20p	3p
Humanism, Christianity and Sex	David Tribe	2½p	3p
103: History of a House	Elizabeth Collins	5p	3p
Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	10p	3p
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	2½p	3p
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	10p	3p
An Analysis of Christian Origins	George Ory	12½p	4p
New Thinking on War and Peace	A. C. Thompson	5p	3p
A Humanist Glossary	Robin Odell and Tom Barfield	20p	4p
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	3p	3p
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	60p	9p
Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux	Eddie and Win Roux	£2.25	21p
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Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	5p	4p
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President Charles Bradlaugh MP	David Tribe	£4.00	25p
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