

fundamental ends is practically non-existent. Nothing could be more evident, in this connection, than the bankruptcy of government thinking about education. A recent leader in the Times Higher Education Supplement rightly noted how the 'great debate' about education which extended from the time of Arnold and Newman in the middle of the last century to that of Tawney and Leavis (to name only two contributors) in the middle of this, has now degenerated into the mere 'clatter of policy speak'. But this clatter is not really just the absence of a genuine philosophy of education: it is rather an alternative to all philosophising whatsoever, an attempt to forget the tradition we have inherited, and to deny, if only by consciously failing to notice, the very principles which Tawney and others affirmed as almost self-evident to all decent people. Thus, underneath the veneer of respect for 'religious education' and the RE lobby, lies a practical atheism: a denial of the very principles of equality of all as members of God's family, of fellowship in Christ, and of that sharing in a common purpose for the good of all which is the Christian underpinning of Tawney's socialism.

But a house built on sand cannot last long. Tawney, and this new book on him, are relevant to us now because it is beginning to become all too obvious that a social project such as Thatcherism, which practically excludes all serious discussion of fundamentals, in a frenetic pursuit of means without ends, cannot succeed even on its own terms. This is obvious from the fact that the government clearly needs the rich suddenly to become 'responsible' for the poor, in order to bail it out of a mess it has created for itself. It is unrealistic to expect those who have been ardently pursuing what Mr Baker calls 'acquisitive individualism' in accordance with Thatcherite imperatives, since 1979, suddenly to start voluntarily sharing their riches with those who have been unable or unwilling to pursue those imperatives. Tawney was always aware that a purely voluntary form of social responsibility would never be enough, and that Tory romantics who (for example) see the country landowner as one who has a responsibility to conserve the environment for future generations, or liberal industrialists (such as the great Quaker families) who see their wealth as giving them an opportunity for widespread charitable and educational works, will always be exceptions which prove the rule. Recent Thatcherite pleas to the rich, who have become so by what Tawney called 'irresponsible' ownership, to turn around and become 'responsible', are signs of the instability of any policy based on telling people that their worst instincts are actually their best ones. Tawney would have enjoyed the irony of this if he had lived to see it.

BRIAN WICKER

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND CHARING CROSS: THE LIFE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON By Brigid Boardman. *Yale University Press*. 1987. £19.95.

The excellence of this study is the fruit of rigorous scholarship and a determination to start from the positive qualities of its subject. Thompson has suffered as much from his mindless supporters as from his narrow-minded detractors. In his lifetime also he was the victim of a society which could tolerate neither a tramp nor a 'failed priest'. In addition Ushaw in the

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1870's, despite the vision of Lingard and Tate, was too blinkered to spot in Thompson a talent which lay beyond its theological tunnel-vision.

And this society was slow to change. In the 1920s our schoolteachers could only say of Thompson — 'He has an unusual vocabulary. As mystic poet he has affinities with Crashaw. There is an note of regret for an unhappy past'. No one got inside Thompson; yet despite the impoverished diet one image survives — 'the traffic of Jacob's ladder pitched between heaven and Charing Cross'. Doctor Boardman aims to get inside Thompson and eventually does so through this very image.

Her work throughout is marked by a scholar's thoroughness — Thompson's prose is given copious attention; by the art of making connections — the connection between *Daisy*, that slight neglected poem, and *Ode to the Setting Sun*; and by a sensibility which perceives how Thompson responded to influence. When reflecting on the influence of writers like Shelley, Crashaw, Sir Thomas Browne, she writes, 'No influence of that kind can account for the way in which they (the influences) are assimilated into Thompson's own voice as a poet'.

The influences were extremely disparate. There was the cruel tension created by his religious training which taught that all pride in achievement was the work of the devil. There was the behaviour of the clergy who applied a kind of religious means test before helping the poor; on the other side there was the altruism of James McMaster who took Thompson in and cared for him simply because he was, in McMaster's own words, 'a damp rag of humanity'. The hospitality of the Canons Regular at Storrington provided the setting for *Ode to the Setting Sun*. The Franciscans at Pantasaph introduced him to theological reflection about grace and nature which was intellectually crucial to his poetic vision. And humanly crucial was the influence of the anonymous prostitute who tended Thompson when he was at the end of his tether and probably saved him from suicide. Here Boardman wastes no space on trivia. She writes, 'It is comparatively unimportant here whether the love he had known found expression in sexual union. What matters is that for the first time he experienced love as spontaneous, unquestioning. At the lowest ebb of failure he was accepted for what he was, not for what he could or should be. And without that experience "The Hound of Heaven" could not have been written'.

Boardman creates a space in the mind where we can stand and watch the boy, the seminarian, the medico, the tramp, the man, the writer, the poet. Reading this book is an adventure, and it reaches its climax in two paragraphs on page 306 and 308. At this point I found something I did not know I had been looking for for years. Doctor Boardman is examining that late poem known variously as *The Kingdom of God* and *In No Strange Land*. Here, she says, 'Thompson touches on a theme which in other circumstances could have revived the true poet in him'. Throughout his life Thompson had felt himself unable to draw together in his poetic vision the two dimensions of earth and heaven, grace and nature, the human and the divine. That is the poet's version of the search that is the lot of everyone who is truly human. The poet's particular need is to find this reconciliation in words which bring it to life, for that is the nature of poetry. For Thompson the search began with *Ode to the Setting Sun* which marked his poetic

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awakening. Boardman believes that almost at the end of his life he found the answer to his search in this poem. 'For Thompson the ladder had an added meaning. Was the poem inspired by the sudden memory of the Sussex downs imposed on the scene of his present life with its other memories of his life on the streets? So it seems. The *Ode to the Setting Sun* was completed 'ascending and descending' the 'Jacob's ladder' cut into the downs above Storrington. Now the shadow cast over the sun by the Cross uniting earth with heaven, the two dimensions of his poetic vision in a movement which, as a poet, Thompson felt himself unequal to express. Unquestionably he did so here. The ladder reaches to heaven, because, like the Cross — so significantly recalled at this point in the poem — it is firmly founded in the earthbound reality of human life'.

This is a triumph of architectonic vision articulating the whole sweep of Thompson's vision. I can see now why the image of the ladder survives and why Thompson is more than a flawed genius.

It is a pity there are twenty three misprints (at least) in such a fine work from so prestigious a publisher.

GERARD MEATH OP

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT by PHEME PERKINS, *Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, Pp. 350.*

This is the revised edition of a work first published in the USA in 1978. It deserves a wide readership for it will inform, sometimes provoke, often excite, occasionally infuriate, but always stimulate. It is a joy to enter into dialogue with it. That, however, is not its main purpose. Sub-titled, 'An introduction', its first chapter suggests that it is designed for real beginners since it really does begin at the beginning and takes nothing for granted. It ends (like every chapter) with a number of questions designed to put emphasis upon what is important and to lead on to further reflection which should make for a deeper discipleship. The idea behind the work is admirable and gives it a distinctiveness among N.T. introductions.

How effective though is its execution, and how valid is the approach which controls it? We take the latter question first. The work as a whole is written from the perspective of one who has taken on board much that has been offered by recent sociological and literary approaches to the New Testament. There are good chapters on 'the world of Jesus', 'the beginnings of Christianity' and 'the world of Paul'. What Perkins says is always interesting and often fascinating. The sociological approach is seen at its best in the treatment of Paul's letters to Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth. It is less successful with Galatians and Romans. Here, we need a bit more on Pauline theology. The apostle's thinking on the law, on justification by faith, and on the place of Israel in the divine plan of salvation needs to be tackled more systematically if the reader is to understand the heart of his message in these writings.

Again, one feels the need for more theological seriousness in her treatment of the gospels and their witness to Jesus. Here, the overall approach can be classified generally as one of a literary-critical kind. There are some excellent insights into the make-up, structure, and outlook of the