



Reviews

EDITOR: John Nicholls, 17 Upper Trinity Road, Halstead, Essex, CO9 1EE. Tel. 01787 473089; e-mail: igmnicholls@classicfm.net

Memories of a Jewish refugee*

Malcolm Edwards

THIS VERY interesting 176-page book was written by a Czech Jewess who, with her elder sister Eva, was orphaned by the Nazi Holocaust and, like many other Jewish refugees of those days, found homes with English families. Whilst in this respect it is no different from many other books that describe the heart-rending troubles of so many Jewish families at that time, it is of interest to ourselves in that the writer mentions the part Christadelphians played in taking in many of these refugees.

The book actually came to light after the author, Vera Gissing (née Diamant), sent a copy to Sister Hanna Holman, who lives in Ringwood, Victoria, Australia, whom she knew to have suffered similarly in losing her own parents in Nazi concentration camps. In fact there is a remarkable parallel, in that Sister Holman also came from Czechoslovakia and was likewise orphaned, with her sister in the flesh, both finding foster parents in Britain but Hanna being the only one to be taken in by a Christadelphian family. Vera Gissing wrote in the flyleaf of the copy she sent: "To Hanna, my story of hope and fear, of love lost, and love received, may mirror your own memories of that extraordinary fragment of our lives, and will bring us close across the miles".

The writer's story began in 1937. She recalls with fond memories her happy childhood days in a village near Prague. She recalls the school camp she attended at the age of nine, and how she wept when she became homesick. The camp leader comforted her by saying that, as her name was Diamant (Diamond), her tears were real pearls. It was this memory that gave rise to the title of the book.

The Diamant family were not very devout Jews, and, when Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia threatened, they all became Christians, but this mattered nothing to the German storm troopers who marched into their streets looking for Jews. Their mother had heard, via her sister, that there was an organisation in England that was

finding homes for Jewish refugees, and she registered her two daughters with this organisation, an action which almost certainly saved their lives.

A family in Bootle took Vera in, and later she attended a Czechoslovak State School at Hinton Hall, near Whitchurch, Shropshire. There she met up with relatives and friends, and particularly Honza, her cousin. It is when describing his experiences in Britain that she mentions Christadelphians:

"He was then sent to a hostel for refugee boys near Rugby, run by a shopkeeper, Mr Overton, a truly remarkable man. As a practising Christadelphian he had striven tirelessly even prior to the occupation of Czechoslovakia to convince the British government that Jews in occupied territories were in great danger and that something must be done to save the children, first from Germany and Austria, then later, Czechoslovakia. He lobbied members of Parliament and gathered a circle of supporters to form a pressure group. Many years later, when Honza visited Mr Overton, he brought down from the loft his proudest possession—a cardboard box with over two hundred labels—name tags that children had worn round their necks when they arrived in England and came into his care: each tag represented a life he had saved".

Vera tells of the hardships of many Jewish children of those days, but praises the foster parents who took them in. She goes on to tell how she finally lost contact with her own parents, who, with a number of other Czech Jews, had been imprisoned in a fortress at Terezin, and then in concentration camps. Her father died first, but her mother survived the holocaust, only

* *Pearls of Childhood*, Vera Gissing, Robson Books. ISBN 086051 524 9 (hardback), ISBN 086051 945 7 (paperback).

to die of typhus in Belsen just two days after the cessation of hostilities.

There were perhaps a dozen or so Jewish children who had Christadelphian foster parents in those early war years, most of whom eventually came into the Truth, and later some of their children and grandchildren. No doubt those who are still with us have their own sad stories to tell. One cannot read such a book without feeling sadness for all those persecuted people, who lost their parents and families and had to restart

life without them in a new land, learn a new language and new customs, and make new friends.

Vera Diamant went back to Czechoslovakia after the war, but soon returned to England, where she married and settled down. She has written other books, but this one will bring back poignant memories for many older Christadelphians who can remember those difficult times and those selfless families who rose to the occasion so magnificently.



Science

EDITOR: David Burges, 7 Whitehead Drive, Wellesbourne, Warwick, CV35 9PW.
Tel. 01789 842692; e-mail: dburges@alethia.freemove.co.uk

Science and the Creator

“The days of our years . . .”

David Burges

THE MARVELS of design in the human frame are a constant source of wonder, and of admiration of the mind of the Creator Who conceived them. However, it has to be recognised that there are certain design ‘defects’ in our make-up, and these become increasingly clear with advancing years. Examples include fragile bones, arthritic hips, varicose veins, deterioration of hearing and eyesight, and many others.

Evolutionists often point to these with some scorn as evidence against there being a Divine Designer, who would not have made such elementary ‘mistakes’. They, of course, attribute such failings of design to the random results of natural selection. A group of scientists who are specialists in human ageing have written of the reasons for these defects, and of some ‘design improvements’ that they consider would increase human longevity.¹ In their scenario, the living machines we call bodies deteriorate because they were not ‘designed’ for extended life. Natural selection, they claim, does not aim for perfection or endless good health, but to allow individuals to survive long enough to reproduce and raise their young, thus passing their genes and body

design to the next generation. Defects that seriously hamper survival in youth will be selected against and die out, whilst those that take effect past the age of childbearing will tend to spread.

A deeply flawed theory

This reasoning does not stand much examination. If the preservation and passing on of the genes is the principal aim of life (as argued by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*) then natural selection might be expected to favour individuals with extended reproductive ages and hence the opportunity to produce greater numbers of offspring. This would imply a selective pressure towards *greater* longevity, exactly the opposite of the evolutionary argument above. In fact it raises the question of why natural selection has not, in the billions of years claimed to have been at its disposal, eliminated ageing and death altogether.

The authors describe and illustrate a number of ‘improvements’ to human design that, in their

1. S. J. Olshansky, B. A. Carnes and R. N. Butler, “If Humans were Built to Last”, *Scientific American*, Mar. 2001, p. 43.