

Book Reviews

THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS

By Tony Parker and Robert Allerton.

Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.

16s. 0d.

"WHO'S FOR JESUS?" 'Robert Allerton' puts this question into the mouth of his caricature of a Church Army captain. He doesn't need to answer it. Clearly he is strictly for himself. Apart from a passing weakness induced by a kind thought for dear old Mum, and a faint puzzlement when treated with a kindness and consideration, he is the prison "right guy", the professional, dyed-in-the-wool, all-of-a-piece, no-chinks-in-the-armour, social predator. Virtue is dull and unremunerative (where did honesty get poor old Dad?); crime is entertaining, and if one applies oneself, undeniably profitable. Prison is seen as a fair exchange for the freedom to please oneself outside it, and as a bonus there is the sexual freedom that middle-class adolescents exhaust themselves dreaming about. There is pride in violence used simply as a professional aid to robbery: by implication, violence as an uncontrolled expression of anger or frustration is reprehensible, not on grounds of its social significance, but as an expression of weakness in the professional criminal's attitude. There is an air of realism about it all, touched occasionally and typically by idealism in areas where commonly-held opinions are thought to be

materialistic or cynical. It is, of course, highly romantic. His account of his childhood and adolescence and developing criminality is familiar enough. What is unusual is the intelligence and facility he displays in putting into some semblance of shape the destructive elements in his character. The latter part of the book affords him the opportunity of poking fun at all the agencies who have failed to halt the progress of his delinquent career. Those who have read books by prisoners will be familiar with the content of this; it is, however, well and amusingly written.

Tony Parker, the Prison Visitor who recorded and reproduced the confidences of this apparently well-integrated criminal, is charmed by what he has uncovered and to be honest, we have all been diverted or annoyed. The human situation in which, as individuals, we have to find some expression for our appetites within the socially-acceptable pattern of behaviour, is for most of us perilous. Fortunately most of us grow up, but perhaps never so completely as to fail to be attracted to the unfettered life or to be amused by destructive criticism of the forces that restrain us, and when criticism is as well expressed as this, we are startled into awareness. What a source of fun all earnest people are — schoolmasters, clergymen, psychologists, magistrates, prison staff,

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do-gooders and all. From time to time we give each other cause for laughter and, sometimes for blushing. We are all so busy unfolding the secrets of delinquency that we ought not to mind too much when the process is reversed.

Tony Parker disclaims any qualification or ability to answer the question as to how the personal qualities of his friend could find expression in society instead of against it. I hope it will not astonish him to learn that what is written in this book is not unfamiliar to members of the prison service, who are concerned with just this question. There are, fortunately, comparatively few criminals as professional as 'Robert Allerton': the majority who come to prison justify themselves or otherwise state their needs. The courage which now supports 'Robert Allerton' may not always sustain him. Crime as a profession has the disadvantage that success tends to diminish with continuing practice whilst the penalties of failure increase. The possibility is that when he comes to express a need for help he will have reached a point where help is no longer possible.

ALAN BANTON.

ROBBERY IN LONDON

Cambridge Studies in Criminology Vol. XIV
carried out by F. H. McClintock and
Evelyn Gibson.

Macmillan & Co. 168 pp.

30s. 0d.

THE CRIMINOLOGIST of today, particularly the man concerned with the cause and treatment of delin-

quency, will find little in this concise and well-diagrammed study into Robbery in London, which will assist him toward diagnosis and care for those men who may be committed for this particular offence,

This volume, the result of painstaking research and teasing out from a wide variety of sources of some eighty-four separate factors, is a full examination of the offences of robbery committed in the Metropolitan area in the years 1950 and 1957, and during the first six months of 1960; this has been carried out in an attempt to view this offence in its fuller perspective as a social and criminological problem. Indeed the magnitude of this problem may shortly be seen in the figures published on 8th February, 1962, when the Metropolitan Police Commissioner stated that the number of robberies in London increased by twenty-six per cent over the previous year; that in 1961 robberies totalled 963, six times as many as in 1938: there is however consolation in that New York City had seven times this figure for the corresponding period.

The McClintock/Gibson study has been based on the cases known to the police; in 1950, 287, in 1957, 462, and 333 during the first half of 1960. The mounting graph has already been noticed. Professor Radzinowicz, in his preface, has pointed to the climbing volume of robbery with the disconcerting fact that today there are far more undetected robberies, with a commensurate financial reward for the skilled operators: more robberies.