

A CRACKPOT



Behind the closed doors of this strange religious institution, children sleep on the floor and learn to renounce their mothers and fathers

by Edward Sigall

"I WANT to go away from mummy right away," said little Dylan Benn. "I don't love mummy any more." With those words, the five-year-old boy turned his back on his mother, his father and his home. Today he lives in a world of severe discipline and bizarre ritual — at the strangest school in the world. The school in Dallas, Texas, is run by the little-known Hare Krishna religious movement. Under its harsh and inflexible rules, little Dylan and the 100 other pupils:

Are forbidden to sleep in beds and must spend the entire night on hard flat cushions spread on the floor.

Rise in the pitch dark at 4.30 sharp each morning and march to the school's temple to pray.

Chant the same phrase — "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna" — over and over for hours on end, day

TOP LEFT: Under the guidance of 60 unpaid adults, pupils from many countries learn the sect's principles and nothing else. Local regulations prevent education authorities checking teaching methods. In their teens the brainwashed youngsters are fit only to spread the Hare Krishna belief.



LEFT: Little faces alight with fanaticism, the shaven-headed pupils stamp rhythmically as they repeat for hours on end the mystic chant, "Hare Krishna." Psychiatrists find that the school's weird rituals can lead to brain damage and insanity.

RIGHT: Prostrating themselves before a 7.30 am study of holy books, half-naked pupils and others in hand-me-downs have already numbed their minds with hypnotic chants since 4.30. Conventional school subjects are not taught because they might distract attention from the love of Krishna, the purpose of a believer's whole life.

THAT TEACHES

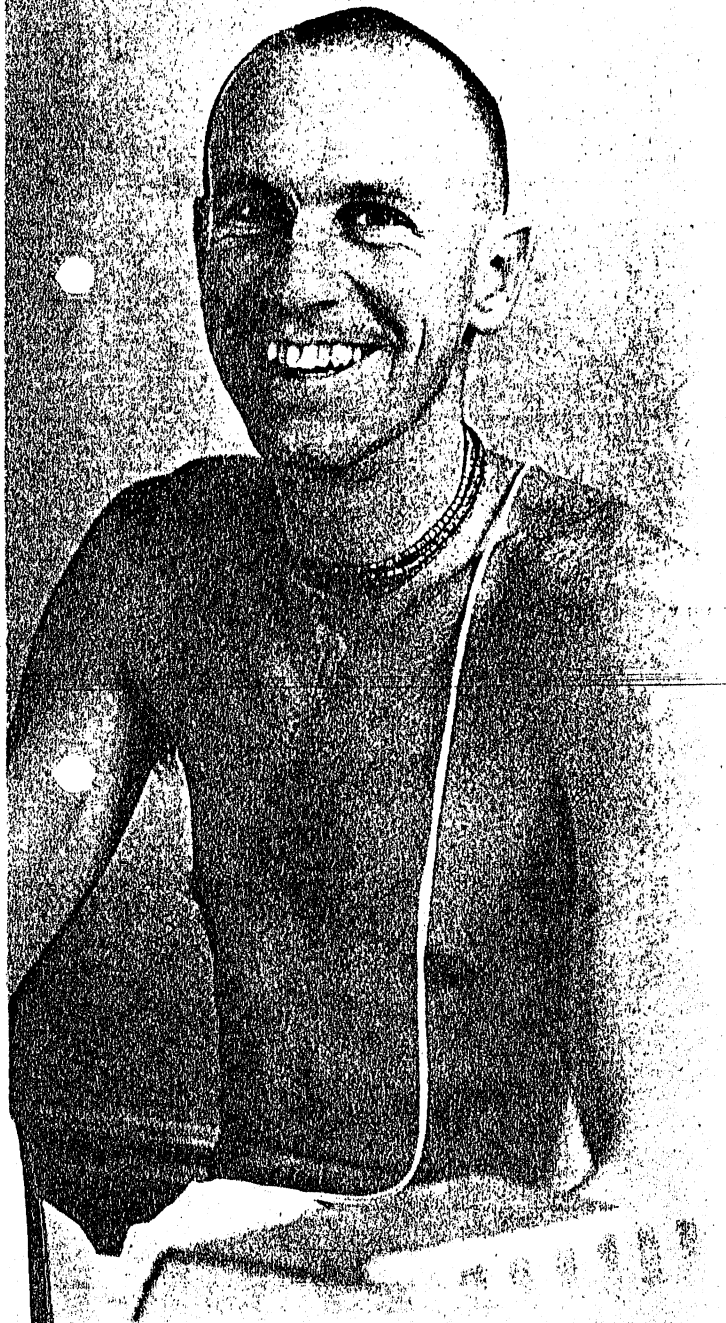
SCHOOL



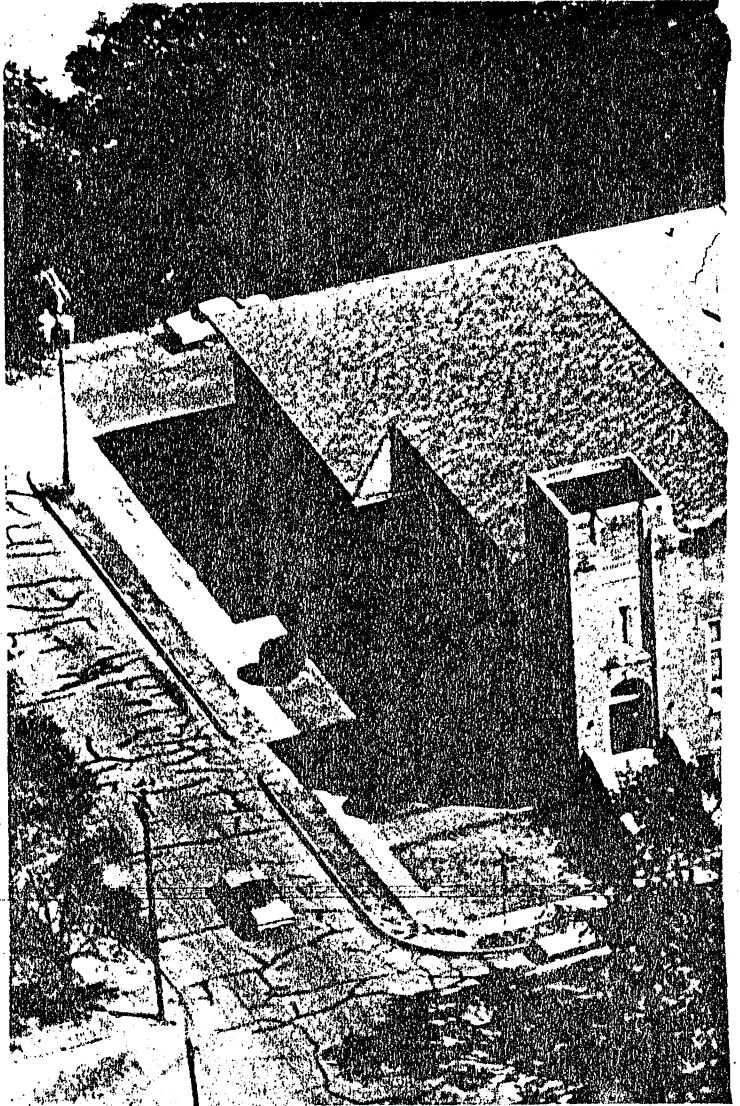
KIDS TO DIE

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NO LESSONS OR FUN



The school is run by a towering former Marine, Mike Wright, who prevents the children being questioned. He claims that if they have no physical contact with parents they learn spiritual love and purity.



after day.

Abandon their toys and story books, and are barred from watching TV.

Subsist on a strict vegetarian diet and shave their heads nearly bald if they're boys.

The children — who come from all over the world are strictly isolated from their parents and see them only once a year.

Dylan Benn came to the school from England. His mother, a former waitress, knows it may be years before she can afford to visit him, but she said calmly: "Dylan is not dependent upon me for love — he loves Krishna, our god."

THE Hare Krishna school's main building, formerly a Christian church, is drab and run-down. There the youngsters follow a daily routine that shocked psychiatrists denounce as "very destructive" and "a sophisticated

form of brainwashing."

The headmaster Mike Wright, a 6ft 4in former Marine, oversees the pupils as they obey the strict rules of the 4 000-member sect, which rooted itself in America eight years ago.

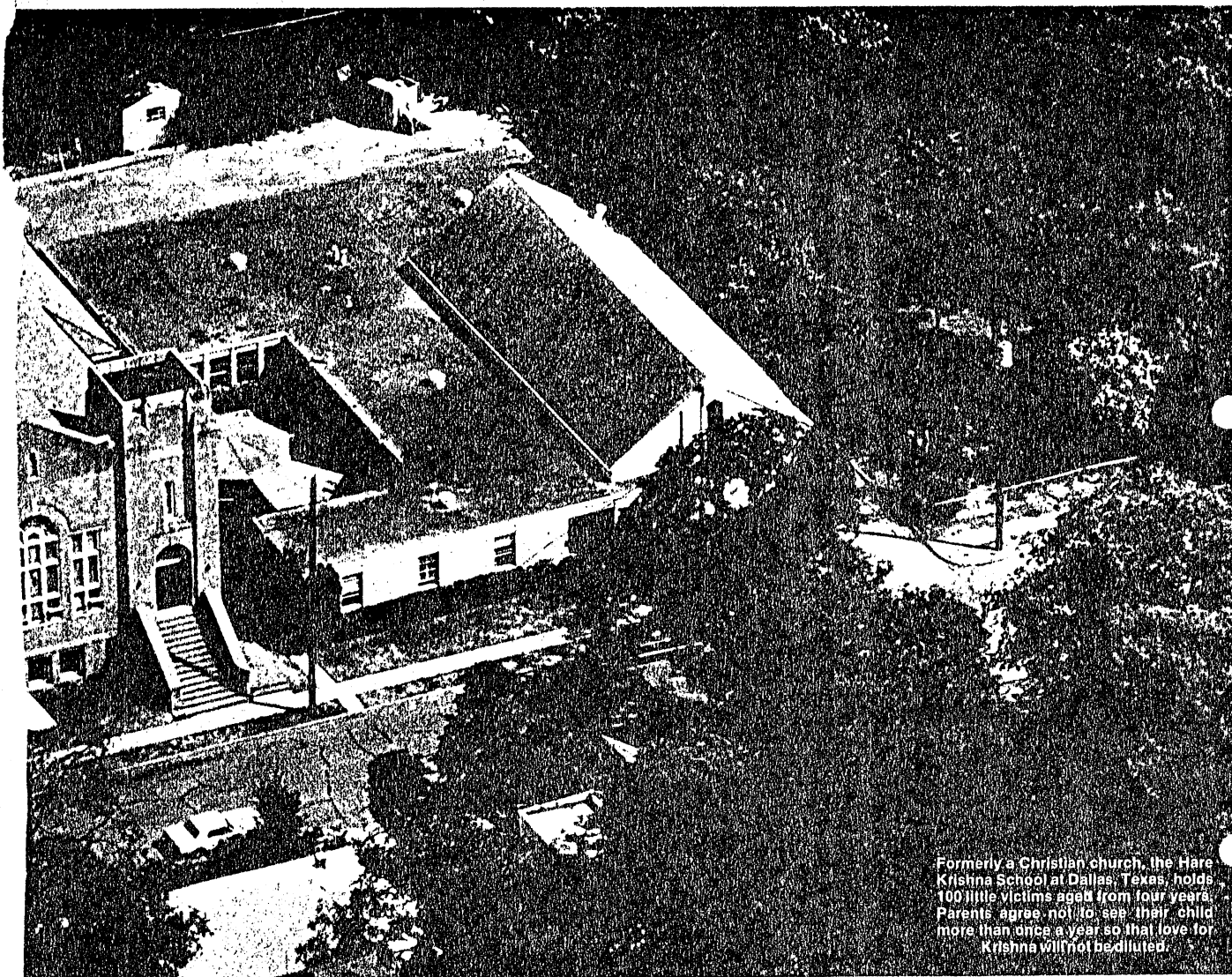
A Texas welfare official, Mr Randolph Pendleton, conducted a "thorough investigation" of the school, but despite the living conditions, he maintains: "We could find no evidence of cruelty to the children."

Wright says: "Despite the rules of our movement, these are the happiest children you could ever meet. But the Press can't interview them; it might upset them."

He sat naked from the waist up, seated cross-legged on the floor as he fingered a string of bright beads around his neck.

Like all male followers of the sect, he had shorn his head, except for a pony tail.

BUT HOURS OF CHANTING



Formerly a Christian church, the Hare Krishna School at Dallas, Texas, holds 100 little victims aged from four years. Parents agree not to see their child more than once a year so that love for Krishna will not be diluted.

"We take the kids from the age of four and keep them to the age of 10," said Wright, who uses the religious name Dayanada das Adhikari. "Then they're transferred to a Hare Krishna commune in West Virginia to complete their education. At 15 or 16, they are expected to work for the movement."

Parents pay up to \$70 a month for their children to attend the school, which is staffed by 60 full-time volunteers. "The object is simply to train our children to live pure and simple lives."

"We teach no science and very little history or geography; they are unnecessary complications in a child's life. They are allowed to read only our religious books — no fairy tales or nursery stories are permitted, and no television."

"The children follow a strict routine. They rise at 4,30 am and chant praises to Krishna over and

over for up to two hours."

ADJUSTING his beads, he continued: "After breakfast, they attend class and at 12,30 have their biggest meal of the day. At 3 o'clock, most of the kids go to the temple again to pray. There's a light tea around 4,30, and the youngsters play until 6,30. Then everyone returns to the temple for more prayer. All the children are asleep by 8 o'clock."

"The youngsters see their parents only once a year. This separation enables us to show them they can still love someone deeply without physical contact — parents and children are drawn together spiritually."

When one Los Angeles mother, who calls herself Sharanagata, sent her tiny four-year-old daughter off to the distant Dallas school, there wasn't a tear in her eye. "I love my daughter — but she

must grow to love Krishna more than she loves me," said the 27-year-old mother. "All she requires is training to devote her life to Krishna and to be a submissive wife who will, one day, serve her husband."

Psychiatrists who hear about the school are afraid that the rigours of the method may cause horrible and irreversible mental damage to its pupils. "Children have been known to die from lack of love, and these children are being deprived of love by being taken away from their parents," says Dr Jack Leedy, of New York.

"What's happening to these children is a sophisticated form of brainwashing and intimidation, even oppression. The boredom in their lives may lead to the death of brain cells, and take away their will to live."

Dr Jack Chernus, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at

the New Jersey College of Medicine, declared: "The school is very destructive. It makes the child see his parents as strangers."

Very little can be done about it. "There are no basic educational requirements in Texas for schools which don't wish to be accredited," explains Dr L. H. Ford, the state's assistant commissioner for teacher education and instruction. "Such schools can establish their own curricula."

"So far as education requirements are concerned, the Hare Krishna school is not violating any state laws."

When confronted with criticism, headmaster Wright shifted his robes, shook his head, and said: "The children don't suffer in any way through the life they live here. It simply makes them pure and deeply religious."

"What more could any child want?"