

PAKISTAN EXPLOITS RELIGIOUS FANATICISM IN WAR AGAINST EAST BENGAL

It is now clear that Pakistan's military commanders in East Bengal have been exploiting religious differences in order to drive Hindus into India. Refugees have told how local Moslems were harassing Hindus, with the connivance of the military forces who did not even attempt to prevent the burning, looting and killing. The Moslem League and the Jamaite-Islam have been mainly responsible for these outrages. Neither organisation won seats in the election earlier this year when the Bengali Nationalist Awami League received overwhelming support. And there is evidence that other religious minorities are being attacked by the Moslems. Communities of Baptists and Buddhists have taken refuge in the Indian province of Tripura. Indian intelligence reports indicate that Pakistan may now be trying to stop the mass flight of refugees. This reversal of policy is due to the almost universal condemnation of President Yahya Khan and the militarists. There are now about five million refugees in India and this may increase to eight million if the frontier is not sealed. Over 130,000 people leave East Bengal every day, and few are expected to respond to the appeal to return home.

NSS Resolution

Britain's attempts to pressurise the Government of Pakistan to control its army in East Bengal has had little effect. In this country over £500,000 have been contributed by the public to the Disasters Emergency Committee which represents five major British charities. Little over six months ago they were organising relief for the victims of the Pakistan cyclone disaster.

The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society passed a resolution last week calling upon the British Government to tackle the situation arising out of the influx of refugees into India from East Bengal. The NSS welcomes, on humanitarian grounds, the belated aid being extended through India, and urge that a much larger amount should be made available in consultation with the Government of that country.

If aid is sent to East Bengal while still under the control of the West Pakistan Army, it should be insisted that the Pakistan Government permits international teams to inspect relief so that the aid offered is not used for military purposes. It is particularly necessary to ensure that river transport provided by the international community is not used to terrorise the population or to carry out military activities.

On the political side the NSS declares that the refugee problem can only be solved if conditions are created in East Bengal whereby the refugees can feel safe to return home. It therefore urges the British Government to press the United Nations so that action can be taken to restrain Pakistan from pursuing policies which have produced terror and disaster. The British Government should declare that the Government of Pakistan have lost all moral right to rule East Pakistan. It should also consider recognition of Bangla Desh, a step which might secure the withdrawal of the West Pakistan Army and the establishment of a secular, democratic government in Bangla Desh.

David Tribe, president of the NSS, issued a Press release last Sunday in which he said "the revelations of the Pakis-

tani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas remove the last vestiges of belief in the legality of any action by the Government of West Pakistan. To stop further slaughter and chaos in East Pakistan (Bangla Desh) and to tackle the overwhelming political problem of refugees in India, it is imperative that the Security Council declare a state of emergency in the area, call on West Pakistan to remove all her troops, and be willing to supply whatever international force is necessary to assist the civilian police to maintain order. Her Majesty's Government should call for a Security Council meeting forthwith".

Mr Tribe has asked Sir Alec Douglas-Home to receive a deputation from the NSS. In his letter to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Mr Tribe refers to Britain's particular responsibility as the former Imperial power of the Indian sub-continent, which may never have been subdivided at all if self-government had been granted at the time that the Indian National Congress represented the majority of all the community there.

CONVENT CRISIS

"The decline in the number of vocations added to those who have left religious orders gives rise to anxiety", said Monsignor Buckley, who recently organised a conference to discuss the problem. Roman Catholic convents in Britain are now faced with a shortage of nuns which even imports from that traditional source of recruits, the Irish Republic, cannot meet. Some convents may have to close in the near future.

It is estimated there are between 10,000 and 15,000 nuns in Britain at the present time. This is 20 per cent less than eight years ago when the decline in recruitment was first noticed. The greatest reduction has been in the number of girls aiming to become teachers in convent schools. This

GLADSTONE AND THE UNIVERSITY TESTS

ACT OF 1871

ERIC GLASGOW

During the nineteenth century the restriction of all teaching or senior posts at Oxford and Cambridge to professed Anglicans, restricted the true function of a University in its pursuit of free inquiry and all the diverse aspects of truth. There were, it is true, alternatives to the old "seats of learning"; Durham had had a university from 1832 and London from 1836—but neither of those had, during the nineteenth century, anything like the prestige, wealth or academic heritage and resources of the two traditional places.

So one can trace the refusal of some of the best and the most original and vigorous thinkers in Victorian times to accept the straight-jacket of Anglican orthodoxy; in A. H. Clough's resignation of his Fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1848; Leslie Stephen's difficulties at Cambridge over his Tutorship at Trinity Hall; and Henry Sidgwick's resignation of his Fellowship at Trinity College in 1869. Henry Sidgwick was one of the prime movers in the struggle to remove the injustice of the religious tests upon academic inquiry and teaching, with all their latent implications of dishonesty and expediency.

Pressure on Gladstone

It was an opportune time because it found Gladstone as an effective instrument of politics. He formed his first Cabinet in December, 1868, so that Henry Sidgwick's academic crusade at Cambridge almost coincided in its early stages with the Liberal attainment of power and responsibility. Nevertheless Gladstone, who was a very strong and faithful Anglican, was slow to dedicate himself to the removal of the Anglican monopoly at Oxford and Cambridge: the subject had first to be taken up by other Liberals, such as George Goschen (MP for the City of London) and Sir John Coleridge, distinguished barrister and MP for Exeter, from 1865 to 1873. If Gladstone had readily or immediately accepted the reform then it would certainly have reached the statute book in 1870. But

Gladstone hesitated, perhaps fearful of the consequences of any change in the traditions of Oxford. Only after considerable delay, and much pressure from his Liberal colleagues, did he decide to put into law the important University Tests Act which became effective on 16 June, 1871.

It had to face considerable Parliamentary opposition, especially in the House of Lords led by the third Marquis of Salisbury. He, too, was an enthusiast for Oxford's "dreaming spires" and privileged detachment, and his strenuous opposition to any sort of liberalism had not been modified by his succession to the family title in 1868. Nevertheless, since the Liberal majority in the House of Commons was then 115, Gladstone's wishes in relation to the University Tests Bill were virtually bound to become law. The Act of 1871 completed the Act of 1854 which had permitted matriculation and admission to the degree of BA, without subscription to the 39 Articles. It was also a preliminary step towards the changes of 1877 which reformed the teaching resources of the universities by removing redundant or "idle" posts, and even towards the findings and consequences of the Commission of Inquiry of 1919 to 1922.

Landmark

The University Tests Act of 1871 was a radical measure which removed an obvious injustice and constituted one of the most noteworthy and significant of the achievements of the first Gladstone administration (1868 to 1874). It was in line with the general policy of that Government, which was to "bring nearer equality of opportunity for the middle classes, particularly the Nonconformists" (*From Castlereagh to Gladstone, 1815-1885*, by Derek Beales, Nelson, 1969), and it formed an important landmark, in the social, intellectual and academic development of Victorian England. Certainly, I think it is appropriate to recall the University Tests Act in its centenary year.

THE GOD IDEA

JACK BENJAMIN

There is hardly a step in human progress to which the god idea was not an obstacle. Any effort man bestowed upon improving his conditions was counteracted by pious talks about the "hereafter", the prime goal of human existence, according to the theologians. Whenever a thinker arose to question doctrines drawn from the prehistoric god idea he was pounced upon; and even in relatively recent ages it was the accepted procedure to send him to the glorious "hereafter" by building a bonfire under him or by torturing him to death. The supreme ghost of the cosmos must not be offended, for, if too many persons offend him, the superstition claiming his authority will lose its value to the class who live by it, and they will find themselves out of their privileged status.

As society advanced it became too dangerous to allow the question of life and death to remain in the constricting hands of ignorant priests. The right of the Church to put a man or woman to death was taken away; but what has not been eradicated from our society is the insidious social

ostracism based upon a difference of religious opinion. Despite centuries of progress there are still many States in which an atheist's word is not accepted in a court. Being in the intellectual minority, he has exerted against him the accumulated prejudice of the age. Nevertheless, it is impossible to prevent certain persons from thinking. Abundant information and knowledge are available, and there is too glaring a contrast between technological attainments and the god idea. There are always individuals to whom truth means more than blind acquiescence in the accepted traditional beliefs. Ultimately, many of them realise the absurdity of religious teachings, achieve mental emancipation and become atheists.

Fact, not Faith

The increasing complexity of our civilisation depends upon precise and demonstrable knowledge. Faith is of no

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JESUS: A VIEW POINT

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

"If Christ be not risen, then our faith is in vain." This remark of St Paul's constitutes both the great strength and the peculiar weakness of Christianity, considered in relation to the other world religions. The belief that something uniquely important happened in Palestine 2,000 years ago has shaped our entire Western civilisation; yet it has also made Christianity, alone among the great religions, uniquely vulnerable to informed criticism. For however imposing the whole structure of Christian theology, ultimately it must derive its validity and significance from a set of specific historical assertions the truth of which is a matter for the trained historian, and not the theologian, to decide.

The "myth theory" of Jesus is a view which has never commanded the assent of the majority of New Testament scholars and has laboured under a cloud of late. The overwhelming weakness of the myth theorists, to date, is that they have not provided a sufficiently cogent alternative theory of Christian origins. Some of them attempt to do so by showing that the messianic ferment among the Jews of first-century Palestine easily gave rise to a belief in a supernatural figure sent from God to redeem sinners through his own death. This idea of the Messiah is vitally important in Christian origins.

According to Old Testament prophecy, the so-called "last times" of the Jewish people—the period beginning about 46 BC—would be marked by extreme unrest and turbulence in the world and by great persecution of the Jews, the chosen people of God, by foreign oppressors. But provided that the Jews remained "zealous for the Law", God would intervene by sending the Messiah to lead his people out of bondage and establish the Kingdom of God, located in Palestine. It was thus the duty of the Jewish nation to resist the paganising tendencies of their rulers (the Romans) and fight for their own religious purity.

Opposition to the Romans

The first century, in particular, was notable for the number of messianic "pretenders" that appeared on the scene, led brief and abortive revolts against the Romans, and had their followers' hopes dashed by their subsequent execution. The Roman governors of Judaea certainly had their hands full in keeping order, and in the year 66 had to contend with a full-scale revolt led by the Zealots, the extreme nationalist party of the Jews, which lasted for four years until the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Even then, Jewish messianism was by no means extinct. A second major revolt took place in the years AD 132-135, under the messianic aspirant Bar Kochbar, and it took all the Roman's military prowess to overcome the Jews' savage resistance.

Palestine at this time was a land in which the religious aspirations of the Jews became inevitably connected with political uprising against Roman rule. It was in this context of continual unrest that we must see the rise of Christianity, and attempt an evaluation of the role of Jesus which takes into account the fact that he was certainly regarded as the Messiah by his contemporaries, and quite possibly by himself. The word "Christ", for instance, is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew title "Messiah", which means the "anointed one". The "gospel" of the Christians originally meant the Good News that the Messiah expected by the Jews had now come.

The spreading of the gospel, however, was largely undertaken by Paul. And there is no doubt that, for Paul, the historical Jesus is very small beer compared to "Christ crucified". In *The Jesus of the Early Christians* Professor G. P. Wells' argument is that Paul's Jesus is a divine being who had died for the redemption of the world, in common with many pagan gods of the time. As Christianity was rooted in hellenistic soil, it naturally tended to adopt many of the saviour-god myths of the "mystery religions" that flourished at that time. To distinguish their god from the others, the Christians found it necessary to clothe the mythical figure of Jesus with biographical detail largely drawn from the scriptures, and designed to show that their god really was the Christ. Professor Wells, like other myth theorists, makes great play of the fact that the earliest Christian documents, the Pauline epistles (which date from about 20 years after the alleged crucifixion of Jesus around AD 30), do not mention any concrete details about him at all, but are almost wholly "Christological" in their approach.

"King of the Jews"

Equally striking is the lack of reference to Jesus in the pagan and Jewish writings of the time. The most famous of what references there are is the passage in the *Annals* of the Roman historian, Tacitus, writing about AD 120, the authenticity of which cannot seriously be questioned as it refers in the most disparaging terms to the Christians and therefore cannot be a Christian interpolation. As, however, Tacitus may have derived his information about Jesus from a Christian source—so runs the argument—the passage cannot witness to the existence of an independent pagan tradition concerning Jesus. This seems to me to be weak. Why should the early Christians gratuitously invent the entire episode of the *Roman* trial and *Roman* execution of Jesus—both mentioned in the *Annals*? As crucifixion was a characteristic Roman punishment, used extensively in Palestine for sedition, the fact that their Lord had been crucified was a source of considerable embarrassment to the early Church. It led the Romans to view their sect with the extreme hostility that Tacitus displays, and which was responsible for the repeated official persecution of the new religion. That the early Christians took great care not to offend the Romans more than necessary is shown by the progressive tendency in the gospels (Mark through John) to place the blame for Jesus' death on the *Jews*, and to exculpate the Romans altogether. The fact that in the end the gospels all affirm that Jesus was executed by the Romans on a Roman charge (sedition) is a strong argument of his historicity to which not nearly enough weight is given.

This political charge levied against Jesus—that he was the "King of the Jews"—made sense in the context of first-century Palestine, in which religious ardour and political action went hand-in-hand. And there is a great deal of internal evidence in the gospel narratives to support the "political" view of Jesus (see, for instance, Professor S. G. Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots*). Professor Wells, on the other hand, tends to dismiss as legend all indications of revolutionary activity in the gospel story, such as Jesus' triumphant messianic entry into Jerusalem and the "cleansing of the Temple" episode. It is therefore all the more

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

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

EVENTS

Humanist Holidays. Summer Centre in the Lake District is now full. Youth Camp being planned for 24 July until 1 August in Salop. Details: Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (telephone 642 8796).

Humanist Housing Association, Blackham House, 35 Worpole Road, London, SW19 (near Wimbledon station), Sunday, 27 June, 3 p.m. Garden Party. "Freethinker" readers welcome. Independent Adoption Society. The Post Graduate Centre, Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway Road, London, N7, Saturday, 19 June, 2.45 p.m. Annual General Meeting. Speaker: Lois Raynor, Director of "Adoption of Non-white Children". London Young Humanists, 5 Kew Gardens Road, Richmond, Surrey, Saturday, 19 June, 8 p.m., Garden Party. Details: telephone 940 3794.

The Progressive League, Halden House, Dunchideock, Exeter, 7-14 August, Summer Conference. Details from Ernest Seeley, c/o Progressive League, Albion Cottage, Fortis Green, London, N2.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 20 June, 11 a.m. Colin Hamer: "The Nature of Self".

Nottingham Women's Liberation Movement. The Meadows Community Centre Kirkwhite Street, Nottingham, Wednesday, 23 June, 7.30 p.m. Speaker: Ronald Bramer, Regional Secretary of the Family Planning Association. Also WLM Panel.

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NEWS

OFFICIAL VISIT

For the first time since the founding of the Brook Advisory Centres seven years ago a Minister of State for the Department of Health honoured the Centres with an official visit last week. At the head office of the BAC Mrs Helen Brook, founder and chairman, introduced Lord Aberdare to members of the Board, the Medical Advisory Committee and representatives of branches.

The Centres provide advice on contraception, and counselling on sexual and emotional problems for young unmarried people. In the annual report (published on the day of Lord Aberdare's visit) Mrs Brook writes: "Through the year 1970 we have seen a remarkable expansion in the provision of birth control advice for the unmarried by general practitioners, local health authorities, hospitals and the Family Planning Association in addition to over 10,000 seen in our own Centres during the year. Our original concept of a specialised service for the young has proved valid. I am now more than ever convinced that there should be Centres where new and varying approaches to the special problems of youth and adolescence can be put into practice without delay".

The Brook Advisory Centres are making a particularly important contribution in helping young girls who have already had one pregnancy to avoid another. In Birmingham, 15 per cent, and at King's College Hospital, London, 25 per cent of the new patients had previously been pregnant. Young girls seeking therapeutic abortion are particularly in need of support and counselling at this time of crisis, both before and after the operation. If such help is available within a Centre primarily for contraception, the patient is more readily helped to adopt a reliable form of contraception and thus greatly reduce the risk of a second unwanted pregnancy.

Mrs Brook continues: "The number of young girls becoming pregnant gives particular cause for concern. In 1969, almost 1,500 girls under 16 years old had babies, and over 1,200 had legal abortions, giving a total of at least 2,700 girls pregnant before they were aged 16, a rate of two per thousand girls aged 12 to 16. Partly because of our persistence, it is now widely recognised that doctors may give contraceptive advice and prescriptions to girls under 16 with the consent, as for all medical treatment at this age, of a parent or guardian".

The report, which includes a review of the work carried out at Brook Centres all over the country, gives some idea of the splendid job that is being done for young people and their parents. It also underlines the mischievousness and intolerance of those who have tried to sabotage this work. The community owes much to the people who work in and for the Brook Advisory Centres, and to Helen Brook whose vision and good sense started it all.

TEACHERS AGAINST CENSORSHIP

After considering reports of a statement issued by Mary Whitehouse's Viewers' and Listeners' Association, the Education Committee of the National Union of Teachers said the NUT "would strenuously resist any attempt by any outside body to impose its views or any form of

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ensorship on the schools". Agreeing that members of VALA are entitled to express disapproval of programmes they don't like, the teachers say that the schools, BBC and Independent Television companies may be entitled to expect that such criticism shows some awareness of what education is about.

"The broadcasting authorities can defend themselves, but it may not be generally known that there is very full consultation with educationalists, including many practising teachers, before schools programmes are approved and made; and that the School Broadcasting Council, and the ITA and company Advisory Councils have in effect a right of veto. The NUT is of course fully involved in these consultations, and has no evidence, either through its members on the Councils, or through its general membership of over 250,000 serving teachers, that the views of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association are shared in educational circles generally. School broadcasts, in radio and television, have rightly earned a high reputation among educationalists throughout the world".

It is wholly unacceptable to the National Union of Teachers that the Secretary of State should assume control over this or any other area of the curriculum which has been traditionally been left in the hands of the teachers. Fortunately Mrs Thatcher has shown no public inclination to do so. The NUT statement concludes: "Teachers themselves are fully capable of evaluating the worth of school broadcasts, like other educational resources, and of rejecting any that fail to meet their educational needs".

ANTI-EDUCATIONAL

The White Paper which gives some indication of the Government's intentions over museum charges attempts to "sugar the pill" by listing a series of proposed improvements to galleries and museums, says the Campaign Against Museum Charges. In a statement last week, CAMC declared that the amount to be paid by visitors was as expected, with the double charge in mid-summer "to prevent overcrowding" (thereby admitting that charges do deter), the system of exemptions is surprising in its omissions, rather than in what it includes. The social service principle, which Lord Eccles promised to apply to museum charges, has been forgotten. There will be no exemption for the poor, old age pensioners, or for students as a whole (apparently students will have to book up visits in advance). The failure to exempt children, except those who visit in organised school parties, was not surprising—where otherwise would the Treasury acquire their profit?—but nevertheless a gloomy feature of the Paper. Its significance as an anti-educational measure can hardly be over-rated.

Some have been pleasantly surprised at the "paucity" of the charge: 10p is thought a rather low amount. In answer to this, one is inclined to say that, although indeed 10p is better than 20p, the lower charge is still a deterrent to the poor, to large families and to the casual visitor. Any charge will more or less restrict attendance to those already interested in what these institutions contain: again, we see the anti-educational tendency of charges. But perhaps the most blatant weakness of this line of thought is that, once the principle of free entry has been abrogated, it is very easy to raise charges if the present ones prove "uneconomical".

But what is most objectionable about the Paper from CAMAC's point of view is the Government's perhaps wilful failure to distinguish the issue of entry charges from that of the expansion of museums and their collections. It is stated in the White Paper that more money will be spent on museums as a result of imposing charges. The argument is generally invalid, and, in this case, disingenuous. It is invalid because it is simple not true that the Treasury will be more amenable to requests for more from museums in return for the levying of a tax. If anything, the reverse is true—they will simply reduce their existing subsidy by the appropriate amount. Lord Eccles himself said that taxes could not be hypothecated in this way. Moreover, the merging of the two issues is to ignore the fact that museums are social institutions and not just physical plant: it is their relationship to the public which is paramount, not their status as storehouses of treasures. They are museums, not mausoleums. Lord Eccles does not think there is any great principle involved in free entry. CAMAC does, and will be presenting a petition with over 200,000 signatures. There is also to be a public meeting in September. The address of the Campaign is 221 Camden High Street, London, NW1.

OBITUARY

Joseph Tuck, a *Freethinker* reader and member of the National Secular Society for many years, has died at the age of 84. Mr Tuck had been a freethinker for most of his life and will be greatly missed by his Merseyside friends.

Brian Ferguson, chairman of Merseyside Humanist Group, and Walter Parry of the NSS, conducted the secular committal ceremony at Anfield Crematorium, Liverpool.

(Continued from front page)

has seriously affected the boarding schools, and a number of them have had to close. At the Convent of the Holy Ghost School in Newton Abbot, Devon, there are only five nuns left out of a teaching staff of 18. It will close next year.

Nevertheless the Catholic education system is expanding, largely at the expense of the community. Catholic schools have increased from 2,790 to 3,060 in the last ten years. Subsidies for Church schools have also substantially increased during that period, and Catholic educational authorities are determined to extract more money from the State. The campaign against subsidising indoctrination and segregation must not be allowed to run down.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
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BOOKS

TO FALL LIKE LUCIFER

by Ian Harvey. Sidgwick and Jackson, £2.25.

Ian Harvey's autobiography has two more or less distinct main themes. One is political life and the future of the Conservative Party; the other is the problem, and the suffering, of the known homosexual in society. These two are not artistically compatible, and perhaps should not meet in real life, but in Ian Harvey's they not only met but collided, leaving one promising career a total write-off.

In 1958 he was a junior Minister in the Macmillan Government, just beginning to come into the public eye, still in his early forties, and (as one now realises) with the prospect of another six years on the Government benches. Then one night he was arrested with a guardsman in St James' Park; and Lucifer fell from paradise, "never to hope again".

Reactions were predictable. The British public went into one of its periodic fits of morality, large numbers of offensive letters arrived and after a period of prostration Ian Harvey went back into advertising. His career had restricted his private life; now there was very little left. Psychiatry and Christianity did not relieve his depression, as unluckily he hit on an unsympathetic psychoanalyst and a Churchman who, "having written to me some months before to ask if I could see my way to suggest his promotion in the appropriate quarters, received me somewhat coldly".

Somehow he survived, looking with agonised disappointment at the subsequent fortunes of his party, with which he would certainly have been involved. How closely, no one can tell. Even in the climate of the 70s one can't help feeling that he can cherish no hopes of returning to the Government. The years in the wilderness have done him no good. The book is rambling and inevitably suggests a lack of grip and mental clarity, as well as reading as though it were written 20 years ago, so that references to the 1970 Election or Mr Heath seem strangely anachronistic. Mr Harvey's writing often suggests a disastrous penchant for wishful thinking. In spite of his experiences, he sticks to Tory patterns of thought, and sneers at "sit-ins", at "bent-writers" and permissive people who, "when the backlash develops, will find themselves in for a nasty tumble". If there is a backlash, the people who may come out on top will be those who wrote the abusive letters.

His account of the catastrophe and its aftermath is unemotional but evokes considerable sympathy. If any of his ex-colleagues at the Carlton Club reads it and is made to think, the book will not have been wasted. But the other reminiscences are garrulous, too long to be arresting, too short to be absorbing. One could wish that his publishers, as well as correcting the many misprints, had dissuaded him from making jokes like "I often wonder if . . . there are not cases of accidental homosexuality owing to mistaken sexual identity", deriding the phrase "with-it"—which I haven't heard used for years—and apparently confusing Sophocles with Socrates (Sophocles was *not* homosexual as even Plato virtually admits).

He offers no clear thought or fresh inspiration on the problem of the homosexual, but it stimulates thought simply to read of one man's ordeal. Admittedly, the outcry would not have been the same if it had simply become known that Harvey was living with another man; the degrading circumstances made his case particularly awkward, and in a way he is no more a persecuted homosexual as

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such than Profumo or Sir Charles Dilke were persecuted heterosexuals. What is true is that, partly through fear of blackmail and partly one suspects through prejudice, known homosexuals do *not* occupy top places in the Government or the Civil Service in the way that philanthropists and indeed adulterers could be permitted to. But at least they are not sent for correction, or made into social outcasts; a less courageous man than Mr Harvey might have shot himself, but a less courageous society would actually have given him the gun.

Since Leo Abse's Bill was passed in 1967, the only remaining barriers have been those of prejudice. Ian Harvey knows and well describes every refinement of these, and, as he says, "if I can help confused and unhappy people and correct misinformed ones, then, I suppose it can be argued, it has not all been in vain". But it's a lot for a man to go through, just for an "I suppose".

TONY MASTERS

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF GEOLOGY

Edited by C. J. Schneer. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, £10.50.

For a work of 469 pages the price is indeed steep, and this will mean that most people will consult this work in their local libraries, assuming the library has not found the price too high also. This is unfortunate as *Towards a History of Geology* is an important book, and many of the authors who contribute the 26 essays (originally papers presented at the New Hampshire Conference on the History of Geology in September, 1967) which make up the book are acknowledged as leading authorities in the neglected field of geological history.

An arbitrary choice does not extend the scope of the book beyond, other than incidentally, 1859, the year which saw the publication of *Origin of Species*. Consequently such recent theories as continental drift are not covered as this was first advanced during the inter-war years. However, the choice of date does allow for some of the most fundamental advances in geological ideas to be discussed in their historical settings.

There are few really satisfactory histories of geology in English, and of these perhaps the best is H. B. Woodward's short *History of Geology*, issued by Watts as long ago as 1911. The same author's *History of the Geological Society of London* (Longman, 1908), is, in effect, about the best history of English geology available. There are several other works around either in or out of print, the best known perhaps being Karl Zittel's *History of Geology and Palaeontology to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Walter Scott, 1911—and recently re-issued), however, this work is rather stodgy and more use for reference than reading.

The above histories collectively illustrate one thing, the need for a really comprehensive history of geology. The book reviewed here is a step in the right direction as it explores in depth important figures such as Lyell, Hutton, Werner, Smith, Lomonosov, and others, and discusses subjects as diverse as early nineteenth century attempts at mineral classification, to early criticism of diluvialism in Britain, and ranges over evolution to the history of geology

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in Russia. In doing this it clearly, all too clearly, points to the vast gaps in our knowledge of the history of geology and is in consequence suggestive of the opportunities available for study in this branch of the history of science.

It would be merely illustrative of personal bias to select any particular papers in *Towards a History of Geology* as outstanding; all have a lasting value, although this is not to claim that they are the last word on their subjects, however, suspect that many of them will be frequently referred to in later works. Each article is backed by impressive documentation, and to cap this there is a reasonably good index. On the other hand the illustrations leave much to be desired both in their choice and standard of reproduction.

It is a pity that the work is so highly priced, however; anyone interested in the impact of scientific ideas upon society and their philosophical implications, not to ignore the battles between entrenched dogma—religious and scientific—and the new scientific insights geology brought to bear on both the organic and inorganic world, will find in *Towards a History of Geology* much to stimulate them. If they can afford it the book is a good buy, if not, then it would perhaps repay them to pester their local library in the hope that they will obtain a copy.

ROBERT W. MORRELL

SEX IN THE MODERN WORLD

by G. L. Simons. New English Library, 50p.

Freethinker readers who enjoyed G. L. Simons' articles will, I think, be disappointed by this book. It seems to be based on a collection of newspaper and magazine articles relating to seven aspects of "contemporary sexual activity"—sex in the arts, sex in magazines, censorship, the status of women, abortion, sex and Christianity, and sex and science.

Because Simons relies almost exclusively on the Press for his sources, it is no surprise that much of the information he has collected is so trivial. For example, everyone knows that nudity is used in advertisements. Simons not only reveals this, but also devotes three pages to the names and details of companies which have used nudes in this way. Too much space in this book is filled with this kind of dull cataloguing, which is depressingly reminiscent of similar, boring lists in his earlier book *A History of Sex*.

I have long thought that Mary Whitehouse must have the sharpest eyes in the country when it comes to spotting the slightest suggestion of impudicity. It now appears that she has a rival in G. L. Simons. His analysis of sex in the cinema consists of comments like: "In *Dear John* and *Guilt* the male sex organ is on view, fleetingly and without repetition . . .". On *Blow-Up*: "David Hemmings gaily strips two teenagers allowing us a glimpse of pubic hair . . .". On Judy Geeson's performance in *Three Into Two Won't Go*: "Was there a frame or two of the dreaded hair as she ran naked along the landing?" There are six pages of this sort of comment, and books, magazines, plays and television get the same depth of treatment.

Fortunately not all of Simons' material is as banal as this, but then his book is such a miscellany that it is almost inevitable that there should be the occasional nugget amongst the nugatory.

The best chapters are *Abortion* and *Sex and Christianity*, but most of the material in these chapters will be well known to freethinkers—e.g. papal opposition to contraception.

Simons polarises the sexual activists into "those who would seek simple retrenchment in restrictive sexual rules and those who hope that man can move forward to happier times". He makes it clear that he is on the side of happiness, but this book is not much of a contribution to the debate. It contains too much trivia for it to be serious analysis and too much dross for light reading.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

THE GOD IDEA

(Continued from page 194)

value in a laboratory; the test-tube is. Even a schoolchild realises that if we had to depend solely upon the cosmic ghost our society could not function for an hour. Facts are the basis of our technological and social structure without which civilization as we know it could not survive. The "verities" of religion have been relegated to limbo. Science and knowledge have destroyed the superstitions of our savage forebears. Hence it is that religious forces are today waging a desperate defensive campaign.

Apart from reasons of social hypocrisy, the god idea is accepted mainly among the lowest intellectual strata of society. It is steadfastly held to by the most ignorant; it is challenged chiefly by the intellectual. There is hardly a scientifically trained person qualified to discuss the issue who will try to defend belief in the Bible Jehovah. In this realm of social hypocrisy the ghost who thundered his edicts from the pinnacle of Mount Sinai has turned into a "mathematical architect" or the "essence" of the electron. Where is the absolute and frank defence of the Bible god? Where, indeed?

The fundamental difference between the adherents of theism and the defenders of atheism, is that the former fear and, in some countries, still try to punish doubters and unbelievers while the latter welcome candid criticism. For it is only upon the basis of giving and taking of reasons that atheism has been able to obtain such wide acceptance. It asks for no "faith", merely proof.

Obstacle to Progress

Our social achievements and requirements have reached a point at which religion has become a burden upon humanity. The leaders of the churches must be well aware of this fact and that, no doubt, accounts for their cries and crusades against atheism. Even as an opiate, however, religion is rapidly losing its efficacy. Only the dullest persons try to follow it with any degree of consistency. No longer do we have "saints" who spend years sitting on top of a pillar or wallowing in dung. Those were the days when the believers were somewhat consistent; but, in an era of jet-propelled planes, radar and many other scientific inventions, the popularity of such saintly abnegation has disappeared.

There are those who say it does not make much difference whether one believes in a god or not; but even nominal acceptance of such a belief reinforces superstition. This idea entails the support, passive or otherwise, of religious institutions, mores, and standards of conduct rooted in ignorance and reaction. It has a paralysing influence every time mankind tries to take a step forward. Whether it is the important problem of birth control or the advisability of voluntary euthanasia, religions is still an obstacle in the path of progress.

LETTERS

Humanism and Moral Theory

In his review of Reuben Osborn's *Humanism and Moral Theory* (*Freethinker*, 5 June, 1971) David Tribe talks of "broadening" self-interest and the "highest" contribution to morality that Humanism can make. Does he not see that these are question-begging terms containing suppressed ethical premises?

Mr Osborn, on the other hand, links morality with a natural process of maturation of which the growth of rationality is a part. Is this not to give a much needed objective basis for a moral theory for humanists and freethinkers? D. CARVER.

The Old and the New

In the latter part of the twentieth century it was a surprise to read the last paragraph of Gerald Samuel's letter in defence of the Old Testament (*Freethinker*, 5 June). There is a fundamentalist Bible-belt ring about it. The Old Testament belongs to a primitive long past age and has no place in a civilised society today. It provides numerous examples of tyrannical theocratic rule and is an anti-social production concocted from various sources, Egyptian, Babylonian and Hebrew, aimed at enclosing its adherents in a mental strait-jacket, and so achieving and maintaining power as the Roman Catholic Church does today.

The claim that those exposed to Old Testament exclusive of New Testament teaching are more law-abiding, less likely to commit crimes of violence and to be found in borstals and prisons is questionable. Perhaps Mr Samuel will provide us with authentic statistics bearing out this sweeping assertion. The Old Testament does not seem a very good guide to ethical and law-abiding behaviour. Apart from the beauty of some of the Wisdom literature, the collection of Egyptian wedding songs mis-titled *Song of Solomon* and Akhenaten's famous *Hymn to the Sun* (Psalm 104) the main record is one of barbarism and double-dealing. The late Bishop Barnes summed it up aptly in his book *Should Such a Faith Offend*: "In the Old Testament", he said, "are folk-lore, defective history, half-savage morality and obsolete forms of worship based on primitive and erroneous ideas of the nature of God". Defend the book as an outstanding example of ancient literature if you like, but not as a work calculated to produce good, law-respecting citizens.

As for sex, the punishments prescribed for offences in that field lead one to suppose that some very questionable practices were prevalent. With its loose sexual morality and its "eye for an eye" philosophy it could never be cited as non-corrupting literature; and although some humanists may deplore the present trend towards pornography, it is nothing new really. It has been a prominent feature in all civilisations and has been with us for a very long time as any serious student of history knows, and only at intervals is it dragged out into the searching light of day.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

Out of this Age

Frankly, to suggest that the Old or New Testament has greater importance is out of this age. The great nations face each other with annihilation. Uncle Sam has 25 million Americans below the poverty line. Uncle Joe's heirs stop people from leaving the happy Soviet Union. (If they did let any person leave the other nations would quickly put the barriers up, so I do not see what the fuss is about.) Great Britain enjoys a balance of payments and pretends to care about the poor devils who are unemployed. The white man hates the black and gets most surprised when Black Power is talked of. It seems to me we get soaked up in matters that have no useful answer. Solid issues that would court unpopularity are left under the book case.

Back to the Old and the New. Recently I had cause to study some of the old nursery stories. Many have morals far superior to the Christian story. Jack did kill his giant. The best little piggy did save the other two. It seems we should note that children do love such stories. And they are not rammed into their minds at RI.

ARTHUR FRANCIS.

JESUS: A VIEWPOINT

(Continued from page 195)

extraordinary that Jesus should finally be executed by the Romans. If he were merely an inoffensive Jewish prophet who had incurred the hostility of the priestly aristocracy, he would have been executed on a religious charge, and the method of execution would have been Jewish, such as stoning. Crucifixion, however, was a typically Roman punishment which was never used by the Jews.

Divergence

It is part of Professor Wells' case that the Christians developed the idea of the "suffering Messiah", whose sacrificial death would atone for the sins of the world. This finds clearest expression in Paul, who regards biographical detail of Jesus as irrelevant. Yet this concept is not a Jewish one. Nor did the early Jewish Christians regard Jesus as a quasi-divine being in the same way as Paul and the evangelists do. Admittedly, Professor Wells has a point when he says that we have no direct knowledge of the doctrines of the Jerusalem Christians, since their community and documents perished in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. What they thought about Jesus can only be inferred from the Pauline epistles and Acts. Such as it is, this evidence tends to show that there was a serious divergence of view about Jesus in the early Church. The Pauline concept of the universal saviour whose atoning death had removed from the faithful the obligation to observe the Jewish Law (the Torah) was not accepted at Jerusalem. The question therefore arises why the gospels should depict Jesus as being every inch as zealous for the Law as his fellow Jews, since the gospels—all of which were written after the collapse of the Jewish revolt in AD 70—were addressed to gentile Christians for whom the minutiae of the Torah were incomprehensible. What motive could the gospel compilers have had in thus retaining this kind of biographical detail? Surely only that the oral tradition on which the gospels were based was too strong to be denied. This in turn points to an authentic "historical" Jesus underlying the Christological flavour of the gospels.

There are many other criticisms of the myth theory that could be made. But Professor Wells has done this theory a service by showing just how radically unsure are the early Christian documents as a guide to the "historical Jesus". Modestly, Professor Wells admits that he does not establish the non-historicity of Jesus; what he does do is to make such a view plausible. There is, of course, a vital distinction between making a theory fit in with the facts and actually providing supporting evidence for that theory. And the whole history of New Testament criticism has shown that the facts themselves are so scanty, and inaccessible, that an enormous variety of radically conflicting theories can be built on them.

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