

Reviews.

The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England, by Raymond V. Holt, M.A., B.Litt. (George Allen and Unwin, 10s. net.)

With the help of the Hibbert Trustees, the Librarian of Manchester College, Oxford, has been able to publish this very interesting and scholarly survey of the contribution of the religious group to which he belongs to the life of the community as a whole. It is an important work and has behind it much painstaking research, some of the difficulties of which can only be understood by those who have themselves attempted it. Some five hundred individual Unitarians are referred to in these pages and many of them were known only in their own localities. Mr. Holt has not been content with generalisations; the statements he makes are the result of a careful examination of records from every part of the country, and are supported by detailed evidence.

The word Unitarian is not easy to define, but, as the author well says, "the significance of a word is given by its life history not by its etymology or by the definitions that compilers of dictionaries try to impose upon it." Mr. Holt has been anxious to be as comprehensive as possible and occasionally seems to claim as Unitarians some who were themselves chary of the name, but in the main he is thinking of those members of English dissenting congregations who developed heretical views after the middle of the eighteenth century and members of those congregations organised avowedly as Unitarian after 1774.

Anti-Trinitarian views go back far earlier than this in English religious history. At the time of the Reformation the Socinians and not a few Anabaptists rejected the orthodox creeds, and their views passed over into England by various channels. So-called "Arian Baptists" from Holland were burned for their heretical views in 1575, and the last Englishmen to suffer death in this way were Unitarians in outlook. This was in 1612. Only a few years later non-Trinitarian views were expressed within the Church of England by John Biddle, and with him there began a tradition that was to continue till the days of Theophilus Lindsey, who by leaving the Church and founding the chapel in Essex Street really began the modern Unitarian movement. The oldest Unitarian congregations came, however, of Puritan and Dissenting ancestry. Under the influences of Deism in the eighteenth century certain Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists adopted unorthodox views regarding the Person of Christ and the Atonement, and these formed the

nucleus of the denomination as we know it to-day. So far as the Baptists were concerned it was the Generals rather than the Particulars who were affected in this way. The industrial north has always been a Unitarian stronghold and the churches there were formed in the main in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many distinguished men and women have been connected with the Unitarian movement. In the seventeenth century John Locke, John Milton and Sir Isaac Newton all held some form of Unitarian views. Dr. Joseph Priestley was an outstanding figure a century later. Josiah Wedgwood, Florence Nightingale, Charles Dickens and Joseph Chamberlain had all contact with Unitarian Chapels, and James Martineau stands out as the great modern prophet of the denomination.

Mr. Holt's purpose is to set the life of this group in its true perspective as part of the larger life of the nation and to ask what has been its contribution to social progress. He is not concerned with theological or ecclesiastical problems and is at times a little disingenuous on these matters. "Unitarians believe the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life, and so attach less importance to assent to the Creeds than to the lives that men live," he writes. And again, "They held that only those doctrines should be accepted which were in the New Testament, and that of these only such as are intelligible to human reason should be regarded as matters of faith." But since such matters are not his theme it is perhaps unfair to suggest that definitions like these (and there are several in these pages) do not really get to grips with the issues that have separated Unitarians from other Christian bodies.

Along three lines, Mr. Holt believes, Unitarians have contributed to social progress. They have shown outstanding devotion to civil and religious liberty, a passion for education and a sense of responsibility. In a series of chapters he deals in detail with their contributions to the Industrial Revolution, Parliamentary Reform and other movements for freedom, a new social order, local government, and education. It is an impressive picture that he builds up. From the days of Thomas Firmin (one of Biddle's disciples) to those of L. P. Jacks, Unitarians have been in the forefront of all movements for better conditions of life.

One is tempted to ask what different notes would be struck if one wrote on "The Independent Contribution to Social Progress in England" or "The Baptist Contribution to Social Progress in England." Studies like this would be well worth making. In our own case we could claim nothing like the same interest in education, nor have we had in our ranks so many leading employers from the industrial north, nor have we shown

quite so intense a "regard for respectability and conventionality in manners" but in other respects we have surely shown the same kind of radicalism, and added to it an evangelistic and missionary zeal that have had considerable social results. We also can claim to have been very early in the field with the plea for full religious liberty. It would indeed be interesting to know whether Thomas Helwys had been at all influenced by Socinian thought during his time in Holland. We can claim, too, a notable part in the struggle for civil and religious liberty and in the general field of social reform. Are these things a part, then, of our common Puritan ancestry, and quite independent of our varying theological conceptions?

This is a very valuable study, bringing together a mass of material and opening up many different lines of thought. The debt this country owes to the dissenting groups is seen to be the greater the more closely it is scrutinised. The book is produced in a manner worthy of the firm that has published it, but we have noticed printer's errors on pages 288 (the "e" missing in "Congregationalist") and 324 ("Calvanistic" for "Calvinistic").

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

Did Christ Really Live? by H. G. Wood, D.D. (Student Christian Movement Press, 5s. net.)

The Christian faith has a historical basis, and any doubts which may arise concerning the existence of the Christ of the gospels need to be faced fairly and frankly. Dr. Wood considers that these doubts are more prevalent than is generally supposed, and selects for special study the Christ-myth theory, of which there are many variants, all of which go back in substance to the writings of the late J. M. Robertson. According to this theory the gospels are symbolic and arose out of a Palestinian mystery cult. In the story of the Passion it is suggested that we have, not a history of events which actually took place, but a ritualistic drama which represented and became a substitute for the practice of human sacrifice. The arguments in support of this theory are many and various and at times become very intangible and elusive. The dramatic quality of the gospels is pointed out, everything they contain is treated as symbolic, and the accounts of the miracles are considered as sufficient evidence that they do not record actual events. Positively the argument is based upon researches into the practice of human sacrifice in various parts of the world and supposed parallels are discovered to certain details of the Passion narrative. To the serious student of the gospels the argument as it develops, looks far-fetched and

pointless, and Dr. Wood proceeds with careful and painstaking scrutiny to disclose its many gaps and inconsistencies. He shows that the data upon which the theory is based are unconnected with each other except where they are mutually contradictory. He points out that the dramatic quality of the gospels is a natural feature of their vivid style, and that historic facts are capable of symbolic interpretation, where the truth concerned is of a deep spiritual nature. He discloses the arbitrary manner in which the criticism of the gospels proceeds, so that the generally accepted canons of historical evidence are conveniently disregarded. On the other hand there is no hesitation in exalting what is at first a surmise from some trivial detail into an assured fact. Thus Robertson himself writes on one occasion "we may perhaps infer where we cannot trace the development that preceded the reduction of the Jesus myth to its present form." To which Dr. Wood makes the just comment "Rationalists who infer where we cannot trace should not despise Christians who believe where we cannot prove."

The fact is that the whole subject is approached by these theorists from a two-fold prejudice. In the first place it is assumed that "miracles do not happen" and therefore the gospel narratives are discredited from the start. In the second place it is considered desirable that true spiritual religion should be set free from the supposed incubus of attachment to historical events, and that therefore anything that discredits the historical foundations is exalting the spiritual content of the religion concerned. Both of these dogmas are proved to be false in principle and in fact.

One wonders whether the theory is worthy of such a close scrutiny. One would have welcomed a fuller treatment of the relation of religion to history, of miracle to historical evidence, the weight of evidence behind the gospel stories, and the portrait of Jesus which emerges from the results of modern study. Such matters would be more within the scope of the members of the Religious Book Club for whom, among others, this book is intended.

E. H. DANIELL.

Baptists as Champions of Religious Freedom, by J. H. Rushbrooke, M.A., D.D. (Kingsgate Press, 4d.)

This is the text of an address delivered at the Northern Baptist Convention in Milwaukee in May, and it is of far greater value and importance than a pamphlet of a dozen pages usually suggests. Dr. Rushbrooke holds that it is still an imperative necessity to reassert the principle of soul freedom which is a

primary element of the tradition we have received from our fathers. Over wide areas of the world it is challenged, and Baptists in championing it occupy a position of peculiar advantage.

The Call to Worship, by D. Tait Patterson. Revised Pocket Edition. (Carey Press, 3s. 6d. net.)

This book of services needs no commendation. Nearly a decade has passed since the original edition was issued, and it has stood the test of time. In this revised edition the prayer section is much enriched, and new features include The Adoration of God, our Lord and the Holy Spirit; an Order for the Recognition and Dedication of Sunday School Workers and an Order of Service for the Opening and Dedication of a new church, both Orders being admirable. Possibly the Order for the Reception and Dedication of Deacons is a little slight, and, in another edition, the spiritual work of the deacon's office and the responsibility of the church members to the men and women chosen by them, might well be stressed.

We warmly congratulate the publishers on a very tasteful production, and we hope it will find its way into the studies of all Baptist ministers and lay preachers.

Dacca, by H. D. Northfield, M.A. (Carey Press, 1s. net.)

A big book, not in bulk but in interest and content. It deals with one town, one mission centre; and in the course of nine short, virile chapters, the author gives a convincing picture of the day-to-day life of a missionary and indicates some of the problems which face him in this "front line post." Get the book and read it with care: you will then be better informed on missionary work and policy, and appreciate that a "cut" in the home supplies means the cutting off of travel to outlying districts.

Finger-Tips on Glory, by Reginald Kirby (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., 1s. net.)

Mr. Kirby, now the minister at Collins Street, Melbourne, is remembered in this country for his ministries at Harborne and Huddersfield. This volume contains Bible studies of a fine evangelical quality.