

'sexual politics'.

Greater study of sex in history has created a far richer understanding of the subject. Under the influence of Freud, a rather simple-minded story was traditionally trotted out. History was a tale of libidinal repression. Natural instincts had been condemned by Christian 'thou-shalt-notism'; the sins of the flesh had been punished by the church and the courts. This long, frustrating chronicle of 'eros denied' had finally been changed by heroic sexual liberators, who had dared to challenge the taboo: Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Havelock Ellis, Kinsey and by brave oddballs such as Oscar Wilde and D. H. Lawrence.

Old-fashioned 'heroes and villains' readings of this kind are now under challenge, thanks in part to the welcome appearance of the new quarterly *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. For, as it is explained by its manifesto and affirmed by its contributors, sex is no longer interpreted in that rather hydraulic way, as a force of nature damned up, or allowed free flow, but as a repertoire of personal choices, integral to the fabric of culture and values at large, and inseparable from a politics of exchange and domination, class and race. How was it that mediaeval legends developed the figure of the prostitute saint? What does it mean to talk about 'homosexuality' in the eighteenth century (given that the term itself did not enter the language of psychopathology until the end of the nineteenth)? Articles posing such questions, and invoking the full variety of historical experience to challenge ingrained presuppositions about what is normal or perverse, make welcome appearance in the first numbers of the journal, alongside more traditional scholarship on, for example, the battles over the introduction of the condom into the United States.

Not the least virtue of this enterprising new venture is its genuinely interdisciplinary nature. An anthropological study of machismo in Morocco rubs shoulders with a literary analysis of hysteria in *Middlemarch*; a psychoanalytically inspired account of the novels of D. M. Thomas appears alongside a medical-historical discussion of syphilis in early modern Europe. If 'deviant' forms of sexuality are perhaps overrepresented in the early numbers, this simply reflects the exciting contemporary rediscovery of the gay and lesbian past, so long 'hidden from history'. To judge from its first four issues, the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* seems set fair to enhance our understanding of the historical interplay of biology and society. □

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Practical tips

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BROADLY speaking, psychologists are either academics or professional practitioners. As the subject has grown, the relative numbers of these two types of person have changed radically. The number of university teachers and of full-time research workers has undergone a steady but very modest increase over the years, but at the same time there has been a huge expansion in clinical, educational and industrial psychology.

One effect of this difference in the growth of these two branches has been a radical shift in the balance of power in various national psychology associations, and also a marked change in the atmosphere of their annual meetings. There was a time when the yearly meetings of the American Psychological Association and of the British Psychological Society were dominated by university professors, and the people who came to these meetings seemed interested only in the latest academic theory, however abstruse this was. Now a large proportion of the attendants wants to hear only discussions about practical issues, even though these are often not soundly based on research. Talks on academic research are less popular than they used to be and as a result research workers have begun to feel out of place at these meetings.

The consequent strain among academic psychologists in America recently led a number of them to form a new society — the American Psychological Society — which is a national organization exclusively for psychologists whose main interest is in scientific research. Many American academic psychologists have joined this organization; some of them in doing so left the American Psychological Association at the same time. Others, I gather, decided to be members of both organizations. The society has been holding its own annual conferences — dedicated to scientific research — and it has decided to mark its existence with a new journal, *Psychological Science*.

The journal has, as one might expect with a background like this, a certain parochial air, although one should bear in mind that this particular parish is a large and important one. Each issue starts with a two-page article entitled 'Psychology in Washington', which deals with the relations between current political events and psychological research,

and the topics discussed in these opening articles are often of little interest for non-American psychologists. The journal also gives news about the American Psychological Society ('First APS convention a smashing success'), but apart from this the articles do have a general interest.

The editor's aim is to bring academic psychologists together, and he sets out to achieve this by publishing papers that cover a wide range of psychological topics. The journal includes three main kinds of paper. Two of these are easy to describe and are generally very successful. One is the 'general article', which is usually written by a leading psychologist and which covers a particular topic in a fairly broad way. The second is the 'research report', which is a paper about a single empirical study written in a way that will be understood by any psychologist. The first issues include general articles by George Miller on language and by Sandra Scarr on child care, both of which are extremely well written and very persuasive. The research papers are without exception lucid and interesting. It looks as though the journal will keep psychologists informed about discoveries in other branches of the subject which might not otherwise come their way.

I am less sure about the third kind of article. In each issue there is a 'feature review', which is in effect two or more reviews written by different people on the same book. In theory, this seems like a good idea: different reviewers ought to produce different — perhaps even controversially different — views of the same product. But this does not seem to have happened, at any rate in the first few issues. The reviewers tend to speak with one voice, and a pretty uncritical voice at that. I see little point in these choruses of praise for books by illustrious colleagues, especially when these are books that I have read and which I know to have quite serious limitations. If the editors cannot find daring reviewers, perhaps they should choose books by authors whom their reviewers would dare to criticize.

In every other way the journal is a successful one. It satisfies a need in its own country and it should interest psychologists in the rest of the world as well. □

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