

FOREWORD

Mother earth can be depicted as a lady of 46, if her 'years' were megacenturies. The first seven of those years are wholly lost to the biographer, but the deeds of her late childhood are to be seen in old rocks in Greenland and South Africa. Like the human memory, the surface of our planet distorts the record, emphasising more recent events and letting the rest pass into vagueness.

Most of what we recognise on Earth, including all substantial animal life, is the product of the past six years of the lady's life. She flowered, literally, in her middle age. Her continents were quite bare of life until she was getting on for 42 and flowering plants did not appear until she was 45 – just one year ago. At that time the great reptiles, including the dinosaurs, were her pets and the break-up of the last supercontinent was in progress.

The dinosaurs passed away eight months ago and upstart mammals replaced them. In the middle of last week, in Africa, some man-like apes turned into ape-like men and at the weekend Mother Earth began shivering with the latest series of ice ages. Just over four hours have elapsed since a new species calling itself *Homo sapiens* started chasing the other animals and in the last hour it has invented agriculture and settled down. A quarter of an hour ago, Moses led his people safely across a crack in the Earth's shell, and about five minutes later Jesus was preaching on a hill farther along the fault-line. Just one minute has passed, out of Mother Earth's 46 'years', since man began his industrial revolution, three human lifetimes ago. During that minute he has multiplied his numbers and skills prodigiously and ransacked the planet for natural resources.

ANON