

## IN BRIEF REVIEW

**I**N the latter half of the nineteenth century when the present war between science and theology was in its earlier and fiercer stage, Frederic Harrison occupied an interesting but anomalous place. Importing to England the philosophical and social teachings of Auguste Comte, he attempted to effect a synthesis of the religious and rational life which would be real and satisfying. He failed. The scientists wouldn't have anything to do with him because he smelled of the church. The theologians regarded him as an enemy of the same color as Huxley or Spencer because he deprecated theology and stood by biology. But he made a gallant effort, in any event, and in the course of his sixty years of labor for the Religion of Humanity the militant Harrison fell into controversial affrays with some of the ablest churchmen and rationalists. For the student of Victorian liberalism, Harrison's was not only an exciting life but a significant one, and the tone and feeling of its quality is admirably conveyed by Austin Harrison in the memoir of his father entitled "Frederic Harrison — Thoughts and Memories" (Putnam).

The essential spaciousness of reasoning which prevails throughout C. E. Ayres's superficially iconoclastic "Science the False Messiah" (Bobbs-Merrill) is typified in his initial premise: "That the truth of science is established only by belief, after the manner of all folk-lore". If a thinking mind can regard such a statement as deserving of serious consideration, then the entire volume should give entrancing occupation to that mind's workings. The author writes with a bombastic, indisputable assertiveness of his views, laying them down with seeming certitude of their infallibility, which is little warranted by the inherent vagueness of his theorizing processes and their conclusions. The erudition he brings to bear is apparently liberal and of a wide diversity, but the logic

of its possessor is so inordinately bent upon being ruthlessly destructive that he fails to touch more deeply than the bare surfaces of the immense subjects whose attainments he rashly seeks to undermine and confute by wholesale.

One rather expects labor poems from a former editor of "The New Masses", but James Rorty in "Children of the Sun" (Macmillan) has given his desire for freedom a wider significance than the merely economic. He has stepped out of the rigid, artificial costume of class into the open air and he puts down the universal craving for more life, more consciousness. His fine poem "Prelude: When We Dead Awaken" is full of the sounds of this awakening, the bells, the glorious music of the earth transfigured and glittering, "the high horns", violins, drums, kettle drums. We are to awake, crawl out of our dark holes in the earth, and see our world at last. ". . . and we laughed because Eden had blossomed for us again, and we were clean like the happy beasts that roll where the grass is thick in the sunshine." There is more than the idyllic perfection of happy beasts. There is further awakening which links all humankind, with animals, birds, and grass, into one. The volume includes a group of satires, "American Landscapes", and a "Trans-Canadian Diary"; but the most impressive section is the first, "When We Dead Awaken", which holds most of the shining imagery which has mind as well as emotion behind it.

It is pleasant, for a change, to take up a book like Abel Bonnard's "In China" (Dutton), a record of impressions registered by a sensitive, deeply cultured observer who is able to reveal in an illuminating manner — Veronica Lucas's translation is admirable — something of that inner soul life which plays so important a rôle in the life of a people when its urges materialize in deeds. The

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