

The League and the Underdog, by John Maynard Keynes, on page 800

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Mighty Opposites

... "The high goal of our great endeavour is spiritual attainment, individual worth, at all cost to be sought and at all cost pursued, to be won at all cost and at all cost assured; not such material ease as might be attain'd for all by cheap production and distribution of common needs were all life level'd down to where the lowest can reach."

Robert Bridges has been called a Tory radical, and some kind of a Tory, a poet laureat should fittingly be, yet Jefferson would have subscribed to these lines. And if some of our younger obscurantists and dalliers with the raveled ends where literature and psychopathy meet would thoroughly digest such sound maxims they might still bake a cake or two out of this American dough, that they find so sodden.

For that is the choice the writer will have to make in America. Either he will get more stature for his spirit, or he will commit himself, like our most famous magazines, to a policy of the greatest good for the greatest number when compatible with profitable advertising. There is no in between here. Delicate intellectualisms which are profoundly interesting in Europe are either neglected entirely or crushed by our heavy mechanistic civilization. They cannot get social meaning here, and without social meaning literature usually degenerates into a parlor game. The great writers of the tradition may be roughly divided into those who would and those who would not have been successful in the United States today. And who can doubt that only those of robust spirit—the great mirthful ones like Chaucer and Rabelais, the sharp-sworded ones such as Pope and Byron and Ben Jonson, the bludgeon carriers, Dr. Johnson and Milton and Swift, the high-souled, Spenser and Wordsworth, and the entrepreneurs of evident genius, like Shakespeare and Dickens, would have been those most likely to make head against the powerful materialism of our herds.

The critical principle involved is, like summons like. It was the singular wickedness of the Renaissance that called out the singular pieties of the Puritans and the Counter Reformation. The crudeness of the imperial Roman challenged an elegance in Horace and Vergil. The corner-store Yankeeism of New England was so magnificently small-minded and pettily shrewd that an Emerson, a Thoreau, and a Hawthorne gave the only possible response.

We look for some ringing answer to the five-and-ten-cent store magazines, to the smugness of syndicated "boiler plate," to the smooth insincerity of a Broadway show, the platitudes of magazine journalism, and the spiritual emptiness of our best moral writings. But such an opposite will never come from clever boys, or ultra esthetic experimenters. They have their uses, but not in this six ring circus of active American life. Literature in this country, to get on its feet, needs as much scholarship as the best specialists are putting into the realignment of texts. It needs the vigorous emotions of the revivalist who shoots glory like an unstopped oil well. It needs the subtle reason which our lawyers are expending so fatuously on a legal system fifty years out of date. It needs more intellectual honesty than most American cities could assemble to meet a hurry call. And it needs all the imagination we have used in business, admittedly great, multiplied by ten, and lifted above the production stage to the plane where one con-

Body

By GEORGE DILLON

CRUEL and lovely, being feared,
Iron, and phosphorus, and air—
Creature of chaos, I have heard—
The body were too much to bear;

Yet be the spirit a little brave,
It were as light as plume on wing—
As light, as brief, as foam on wave,
Or on the world the freight of spring:

Then time would cut the ghostly tether,
And the bright captive blow away
In autumn with the eagle's feather,
The falling leaf, the flying spray.

Greek Thought*

By F. S. C. NORTHROP
Yale University

THE quality of Greek thought is such as to preserve it from the destructive influences of time. Its creators combined the modern *flair* for careful observation with the Scholastics' capacity for precise and deep thinking. Insight so illuminated their labors that they succeeded in passing by confusing details to the central point at issue. For these reasons their works constitute the surest antidote against superficiality that exists. Because of these capabilities they founded science, and followed it through to philosophy. This, alone, is sufficient to make them worthy of the serious attention of any people at any time.

However, recent developments in science make an understanding of their achievements of unusual importance. The theory of relativity has brought the philosophical foundations of traditional modern science into question. This involves very much more than a mere generalization beyond Newtonian mechanics. The very conception in terms of which both scientist and layman has thought of his universe during the last two and one-half centuries has been found to be inadequate; the most ultimate and elemental concepts in terms of which the scientists have stated their findings are known to be false or incomplete. Not merely a particular scientific theory but the very foundations of modern science, and hence, of the modern world, are in question. Such a situation has appeared on only two previous occasions in the entire twenty-eight centuries of Western civilization. The second was when Galileo and Newton revealed the inadequacy of the Aristotelian philosophy of science; the first, during the time of the Greeks. To understand these periods, therefore, is to come to an understanding of our own.

But this is not all. The discoveries of Einstein have brought traditional first principles into question, without indicating the new or modified principles which must take their place. This was not the case in the seventeenth century. The discoveries of Galileo and Newton pointed unequivocally to the validity of the physical theory of nature. This happened because of the primary importance which masses and forces took on after the investigations of Galileo. Physical categories were revealed to be the key to natural processes. All reputable scientists proceeded to take it for granted that nature is to be conceived as a system of masses, moving and operated on by forces, in absolute space and absolute time. This is the philosophy of the modern world. Since it appeared to be established as a necessary presupposition of the Newtonian mechanics there was no occasion for scientists to be philosophical. When all agree on philosophy nothing more needs to be said. Man may neglect the foundations of scientific knowledge and give his time to an exposition of natural processes in terms of the accepted philosophical conception.

The situation following the relativity theory is quite different, as anyone who reads the various interpretations of it, given by leading physicists, will soon discover. Whitehead, Eddington, and Weyl all agree that traditional first principles are inadequate.

*GREEK THOUGHT AND THE ORIGINS OF SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT. By LÉON ROBIN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1930. \$6.50.

This Week

"Greek Thought and the Origins of the Scientific Spirit."

Reviewed by F. S. C. NORTHROP.

"Ibsen, the Master Builder."

Reviewed by JOHN RANKEN TOWSE.

"England."

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"David Lloyd George."

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"Oblomov."

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"Mother's Cry."

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"The Man Who Lost Himself."

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN.

"Huntsman in the Sky."

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"The Life of Miranda."

Reviewed by L. S. MEYER.

Blue China.

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Next Week, or Later

Humanism as Dogma.

By WALTER LIPPMANN.

Major Putnam: A bignette.

By LOUIS BROMFIELD.

siders not Where do I eat? but, Why do I live?

We are not anti-feminists, but we follow Havelock Ellis when it comes to sex difficulties, and therefore unhesitatingly say that more men are needed in literature. To throw a bomb at a triumphant materialism is a man's job, as indeed the great efforts in literature in the past, with the rarest exceptions, have always been. Our women are skilful, and in fiction, and particularly in the novel, they have a genre admirably adapted to their talents. Put too much spirit in a novel and it explodes into something else. But in poetry, in tragedy and comedy, in satire, in the modes which admit greatness easily, they have never been great. As for the men—the best of our men writers have been imperfectly educated and show it by taking the wrong road or missing the point of it all half way through life. And most of the rest

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quate, but they and Einstein differ concerning the new theory that must arise. In other words, the facts of science at the present time do not point unambiguously and obviously, as they did with Galileo and Newton, to the validity of one specific theory of the first principles of science. An analogous situation can be found only in the Greek world when scientific evidence led to the three different philosophical theories of Leucippos, Plato, and Aristotle.

Furthermore, when we get down to the bottom of the different conceptions of science which Einstein, Eddington, Weyl, and Whitehead are implicitly or explicitly proposing, we find them to be precisely the same three basic theories which Leucippos, Plato, and Aristotle outlined. To be sure, there are marked differences in the way these modern conceptions work themselves out as to details, but at bottom, as far as fundamental philosophical principles are concerned, they are essentially the same as their respective Greek analogues. It happens to be the case, therefore, notwithstanding the advances of modern science, that we have not really gone beyond the fundamental basic problem of science and philosophy which the Greeks discovered and faced. The only difference is one of words. They were concerned with the problem of the relation between matter and form, whereas the fundamental problem, to which the relativity theory has given rise, is that of the relation between matter and space-time. One has but to note that space-time structure is mathematical relatedness, which in turn is what the Greeks called form, to discover that the difference is purely verbal. The plain fact is that, when one considers first principles, the Greeks are eternally modern.

This relevance of the past to the present does not end here. We have indicated that Einstein's work has given rise to a problem rather than provided a solution. This point must be grasped, if we are not to be misled concerning the certainty of much that our scientists are writing. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the answer to the question of the first principles of science is not something absolutely established, which can be glibly read off by any physicist or mathematician who understands the modern theory. The question at issue is of such a kind, that much more than is suggested by contemporary physics is necessary for its solution. When first principles are in question, nothing except bare fact can be taken for granted. One must begin at the very beginning. This means that a knowledge of Greek science is a necessity. For only with the Greeks do we have the privilege of getting back behind all our scientific theories to the facts from which they were derived. Only when we combine their evidence with ours can we be sure of a truly scientific and non-question-begging solution.

This may seem to be very strange counsel. We must remember, however, that the conceptions which Einstein has brought into question are those which have been longest taken for granted. They were established back at the beginnings of science in Greece. If they are wrong, then a mistake was made back there. No alternative remains but to reconsider Greek evidence and inferences in the hope of finding the original error. As Whitehead has emphasized, we must re-examine the foundation of all scientific knowledge. We have no choice, therefore, but to review the history of Greek science and philosophy.

Hence, the appearance of a book on "Greek Thought and the Origins of the Scientific Spirit" is most opportune. It is fortunate also that the timeliness of the book is equaled by its soundness. The author, Professor Robin of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Paris, brings to his task all the erudition for which the best scholars of his country are famous, and the experience which only an author of an established authoritative study of Plato can possess.

There are many good books covering parts of this period. It is doubtful, however, if any exists which succeeds in embracing the entire period from Thales to and including Plotinus, while keeping us continuously aware of the available textual sources of our knowledge, as does this one. It could have been written only by a scholar who has so mastered his material as to become at ease with it. One can be sure, for the most part, of a readable survey combined with a sound account of the details.

Only one counsel must be given. This book should be read after, or in conjunction with, Dr. George Sarton's "Introduction to the History of Sci-

ence."* The latter monumental work will not be found to provide light reading. It is essentially a reference work. But if anyone is really interested in getting at the truth concerning the Greeks, and in gaining the insight into our own difficulties which they can give, the use of Sarton's book is a necessity.

For only as one brings its review of the history of the technical sciences of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and biology into conjunction with Robin's account of the work of the Pre-Socratic philosophers does one find the real origin of the scientific spirit and the source of the philosophical conceptions which Robin treats. Failure to include the technical scientific background of Greek philosophy, which Sarton portrays, has made all our books on Greek thought positively misleading. Two errors always arise. The philosophical conceptions of Plato and Aristotle are robbed of the empirical and technical scientific evidence upon which they rested; and Greek science is pictured as viciously speculative rather than genuinely inductive and technically empirical. Only if one follows Robin in conjunction with Sarton can these two errors be avoided.

It is not beside the point to add that the time has come for the modern world to realize that something more than a knowledge of Greek stems and an interest in poetry is necessary for an understanding of Greek thought. The greatest enemies of the classics, in our educational institutions, are not the scientists but the classicists themselves, too many of whom suppose that one who is indifferent, or even opposed, to science can understand the Greek spirit. Nothing is more ridiculous than an understanding of the Greek view of life without scientific knowledge and the scientific attitude of mind.

Plato did not tell the educators of his day that a knowledge of poetry and the Egyptian language would produce an educated man. Instead, he said, in the "Republic," with all the emphasis and dramatic eloquence of which he was capable, that no one need regard himself as educated, or prepared to live the good life, until he has mastered mathematics, astronomy, and dialectic, or deductive logic. No such fallacious idea as the modern notion that scientific knowledge must be counteracted by ethical teaching or a study of the literature and the wars of the past ever entered into the best Greek thought.

For it, there is no such thing as a good act apart from a scientific knowledge of the facts which the act in question involves, and a consideration of those facts in the light of the first principles of science. Technical knowledge must be combined with dialectic. The good life is not something to be attained by being continually reminded that one has a soul, or by an act of faith which is supposed to bring that soul into a privileged relation with the Deity. No such easy roads to the good life were ever offered by Plato and Aristotle. Only the person who understands the science of his day and has climbed the dialectical ladder, and undergone the conversion of soul which the discipline of its scientific methods entails, to discover the basic first principles of science which reveal the details in the light of the whole, can lead the good life. Certainly this is sound sense. For only one who can think in terms of first principles can draw the distinction between that which is primary and that which is secondary, which the idea of the good involves.

Before the Greek spirit can become completely intelligible to us it must be taken out of the hands of "scientific historians" and placed in the hands of historians who know science. Robin's knowledge of the philosophical texts and his understanding of Greek philosophy must be combined with Sarton's knowledge of Greek technical science.

It must be remembered, in the last analysis, that the Greek philosophers wrote in the Greek language, not primarily to use Greek stems, but to express certain facts and indicate their consequences. If this be true, then a recreation of the scientific background in which they worked, as well as a study of the roots of their language should provide a clue to their meanings. When this background is discovered an intimate connection between technical science and the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle will be revealed, an insight into the peculiarities of our own situation will be gained, and the Greeks will be discovered to be as eternally modern as the Moderns are eternally Greek.

* INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE. Vol. I. From Homer to Omar Khayyam. By GEORGE SARTON. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins.

A New Life of Ibsen

IBSEN, THE MASTER BUILDER. By A. E. ZUCKER. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1929. \$3.50.

Reviewed by J. RANKEN TOWSE

IN his preface to his work the author says that "its chief purpose is to present a portrait of the man (Ibsen) painted largely from materials furnished by men and women who actually knew him." That this purpose has been practically fulfilled, in somewhat striking fashion, may be admitted promptly and unhesitatingly. There is no good reason for doubting that this latest study of the character and personality of the eminent Norwegian is as accurate as it is vivid, since notwithstanding its more elaborate finish and accumulated details it, in effect, only serves to deepen very general impressions long ago established. It should be said, however, at the outset, that Mr. Zucker, although not particularly gifted with the graces of literary style or any notably keen critical faculty, deserves every credit for the breadth and carefulness of his research, his evident conscientiousness as a collector and reporter of facts, and his unfaltering adherence, sometimes in disregard of such facts, to his own preconceived ideals. As a biographer, doubtless, he is entirely trustworthy. It is only in his estimates of the genius and actual accomplishment of his subject, that his zeal outruns his discretion and exposes him to challenge. By the comparatively small group of fanatical Ibsenian worshippers his book, probably, will be hailed with acclamation as an unassailable gospel. In it, apparently, he subscribes to the dictum of Pirandello that "Ibsen as poet and dramatist ranks next to Shakespeare." One is tempted to ask why Pirandello should be selected as arbiter in a question of this kind, but that, perhaps, does not much matter.

If the book, inevitably, has scarcely anything to tell that is startlingly new or of fresh significance it is interesting because of its observance of minor details illustrative of the personality and mentality of Ibsen, his self-centered, resolute, and cynical individuality, the hardening and restricting of it by circumstances and environment, and, especially, by its almost uncenscious manifestation of the influence of an intellect and character, thus formed and intensified, upon his most provocative social dramas. The main outlines of his checkered and extraordinary career are too familiar to all interested persons to need reproduction here. Much more highly gifted intellectually than the vast majority of his compatriots, arrogant in his conviction of his own superior abilities, and despising the more prosperous but somewhat mouldy society from which he was debarred by poverty, hopelessly embittered though never crushed—he had wonderful courage—by the persistent trials, neglect, and disappointments of youth and early manhood, and morbidly alive to the pettiness, meanness, corruption, and general degeneracy of the system in which he was submerged, he seems to have come to regard the manners and morals of his remote environment as typical of the world at large. The very strength and independence of his character, conceivably, may have prevented him from recognizing or acknowledging the more kindly, generous, or noble qualities in imperfect human nature. It was the seamy and unlovable side of it that he chiefly dealt with and studied with a piercing but jaundiced eye. The treatment of this point by Mr. Zucker is one of prudent avoidance.

That in the long array of the world's poets and dramatists the name of Ibsen must be assigned an honorable place no one will deny. But in the not distant future it will not be found among those of the greatest. For a generation he was the object of an extraordinary publicity which won for him a notoriety—partly due to the gallantry of his supporters, partly to the attacks of his critics—already on the decline. And notoriety is not fame, a matter of later and more persistent growth. Had he, indeed, pursued the road of romantic and legendary national drama on which he set out, when inspired by the ambition of Norwegian regeneration, he might possibly have attained to a much higher dramatic and literary stature, by using material of a less sordid and more imaginative cast. Of those earlier works nothing, or little, is heard now, although they revealed dramatic power and poetic fancy. Both these qualities were exhibited even more unmistakably in "Brand," which, despite its gloomy tone must be accounted among his most memorable achievements. "Peer Gynt," also, with its fantasy, variety, mockery,