

Aldous Huxley in Mexico

BEYOND THE MEXIQUE BAY. By Aldous Huxley. New York: Harper & Bros. 1934. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

MR. HUXLEY took a Caribbean cruise, quitting it with relief to do some rather thorough poking about in Maya ruins and the Indian villages of the Guatemalan highlands. Then he moved on into Mexico, browsed round about Oaxaca, and spent several weeks in Mexico City and the plateau villages.

The sight-seeing itself is disposed of in

witty wise-cracking which differs from the Broadway kind less in intention than in the fact that the "cracks" come from a curiously nimble and highly civilized intelligence. But the scene serves as the basis for several semi-serious passages, in the nature of detached essays, in which Mr. Huxley indulges his gift for discovering unexpected analogies and smoothing surprising or seemingly inharmonious statements and surmises

into the appearance of philosophic form, of logic, and truth.

There is something piquant, of course, in the mere appearance of the author of "Point Counter Point" in such surroundings. He doesn't enjoy hard exercise or roughing it. He is disdainful of the cult of the primitive. An old Indian, squatting in front of a church, blowing interminably on a little whistle and staring into space with eyes like shoe-buttons, reminded him of a photograph he once saw of a giant tortoise swallowing a snake. He was glad to see the last of the black buttons. "Frankly, try how I may, I cannot very much like primitive people. They make me feel uncomfortable. *La bête n'est pas mon fort.*" And while academicians, in the sense of those who think all the correct thoughts and have been instructed in all branches of genteel knowledge, are common enough, as are rebellious rough-necks who deride all fashionable beliefs, there are few, like Mr. Huxley, to whom, in spite of their orthodox background and upbringing, nothing is holy, not even the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The general result is altogether entertaining.

Why, he asks, surveying the impressive ruins at Quirigua and Copan, shouldn't there be a trace, in the austere, abstractly geometric Mayan art, of all that "treacly and ectoplasmic sensuality" which he finds in all the ancient architecture of India? Such differences, he surmises, are largely due to accident, to fashions so vigorously imposed by outstanding individuals that they became "natural" to the mass of the people. There were periods "when death was all the rage in European history. To the fifteenth-century artist a good death appeal was as sure a key to popularity as a good sex-appeal is at the present time . . . the eighteenth century witnessed a revival of this fashionable interest in death . . . the 'Night Thoughts' had an international success comparable to that of the 'Green Hat.'"

Central America is "just Europe in miniature and with the lid off, the ideal laboratory in which to study the behavior of the Great Powers," and with this introduction, Mr. Huxley embarks on a discussion of why men fight, nationalism, doctrines of race superiority, Hitlerism, how to stop wars, and so on. "The commonest, one might call it the natural, rhythm of human life is routine punctuated by orgies." These blowings-off of steam may

be religious, sexual, sporting, political, but human beings seem to demand the privilege of making whoopee in masses. The great thing is keep your orgies platonic—as they are when Central Americans burn effigies of Judas, for instance—"orgies with no morning after, paradisaical vision!"

In Mexico, Mr. Huxley draws an amusing analogy between Englishmen like William Morris, who fled from smoky mill-towns into the pre-industrial past, and Americans like Stuart Chase, who flee from their own industrialism to the fifteenth century peasant society of Mexico.

He doesn't think

Mr. Chase's suggestions for grafting a certain amount of modern industrialism on the "noble savage" below the Rio Grande workable. Hygiene would increase the population, make cities of villages, and bring with it an urban mentality. Electrification, modern methods in agriculture, roads, Fords, would all, even while they lifted loads from aching backs, destroy the old placid, stable, peasant psychology. What might,

and should be done, Mr. Huxley suggests, would be to graft some of the primitive's virtues on the modern civilized man—to give the latter some of the former's wholeness and generality. A civilized man "can go comfortably and, as we judge success, successfully through life, incapable of doing anything except, shall we say, writing detective novels." A highly organized society protects him from his own incompetence. "The problem is to evolve a society which would retain the advantages resulting from specialization while allowing its members to lead the life of generalized human beings."

Mr. Huxley, it will be observed, is quite capable of talking good hard sense, as well as of shocking and exasperating. For one thing, the scene encourages that "platonic" attitude which he himself urges in another connection. The Mayans and Mexicans are exotic enough not to call for that intellectual exhibitionism into which clever men are sometimes goaded by the too familiar notions of their own countrymen.

Dictatorship of the Machine

(Continued from first page)

looking at the world through the colored glass of the religious sanctuaries and seeing the mystical colored pictures. The technical process soon gives a clear glass and a clear picture framed by the window casement. Glass helps scholarship not only through the microscope and the telescope but by aid to the matured intellect through the use of eye glasses, and the revolution it brings in indoor life. In "Glass and the Ego," we see how a little coating on the back of a glass leads to introspection, encourages biographical writings, and develops narcissistic traits. We have political history, economic history; why not a history of material culture? The influence of glass in history may well have been more important than that of Ghengis Khan, Caesar, and Napoleon combined.

There is something about the subject of the machine that seems to lift the discussion to a grand plane. No doubt it is the dazzle of its significance that sets H. G. Wells, Oswald Spengler, and Lewis Mumford to telling of big things. To talk of the machine in a prosaic, matter-of-fact manner, as one does in discussing the production of potatoes, is the sign of a wizened intellect and a small mind. Yet, somehow, such an approach might have some scien-

tific value. The trouble is that the profound significance of its influence, as Mr. Mumford abundantly shows, seems to transfix us. The machine is like Soviet Russia, big, new, startling. A conservative and a radical visiting Russia write books that do not appear to be about the same country at the same time, so great is the power of selection. Charles Beard sees the political significance of the machine; Stuart Chase views its economic effects. Mr. Mumford stresses its ideational side. Though there is some common observation, it is surprising how much original interpretation each can make. This is not a book of many facts leading to a few ideas as is Sumner's "Folkways" or Darwin's "Origin of Species." It is rather a book of ideas—many of them. There is said to be a correlation between leadership and crisis. After the World War, we had Wells's "Outline of History," and Robinson's "The Mind in the Making." In the greatest depression of history, we get Mumford's "Technics and Civilization," and Rugg's "The Great Technology"; both pointing the way.

What is the way? What kind of society is the neotechnic phase to usher in? Capitalism will go, after a struggle; but as I understand it, not necessarily a bloody one. We are to have "basic communism" not of the ordinary kind; but assurance of a minimum standard, for those who participate. After this level is attained, the possibilities of achievement may be quite varied. The economic system of production, distribution, and consumption will be obsolete, and instead we are to have conversion, production, consumption, and creation. (The transition is not given in detail.) As to the political side, I don't recall seeing the word "fascism" in the book. But power is to rest on an improved organization of labor and of consumers.

That these are predictions made in the same detached manner that the eclipse of the sun is predicted is not certain; particularly since the author quotes John Dewey in this connection, to the effect that "the hypothesis itself becomes one of the determining elements in the working out of events." Perhaps the author's predictions are affected by the idea that hypothesis may help to bring them about. Indeed he may be more interested in trying to bring certain conditions to pass than he is in prediction.

On the important point of the future of invention, Mr. Mumford confidently predicts a slowing down of the tempo of research and invention and social change, also the use of fewer mechanical instruments than at present. "The old machines will, in fact, die out, as the great saurians died out to be replaced by smaller, faster, brainier and more adaptable organisms, adapted not to the mine, the battlefield, and the factory but to the positive environment of life." Though this is in contrast to predictions of others, it is a welcome contribution on a problematical subject from so able an observer. A volume, indeed, might be written on this subject alone,—and be worth the cost.

How much we can control our social destiny is a profound question. There is something of the inevitable about change. Against the great man theory of invention, there is the theory of independent multiple invention. There have been two or more claimants for every important electrical invention. The school boy in the United States learns that an American

invented the steamboat, while in England he learns that it was an Englishman; in France a Frenchman. The cultural preparation is ripe; and the invention occurs irrespective of Edison, or any other hero. Great men are always plentiful so far as their chromosome basis is concerned, as is apparent from a table of probability integrals.

Quite fundamental to the analysis is the extent to which idea and social philosophies follow and are caused by science and invention, and how much social philosophies precede and cause invention. Religious ideas are adjusting themselves to science. Democratic dogmas are giving way before technology. Nationalism is accentuated by the communication inventions. The family is revolutionized because steam required a boiler too big for the dwelling house; and the philosophy of feminism is changing accordingly. To what extent would our attitude toward the family have prevented these changes? Attitudes do slow up the acceptance of science and invention, indeed they may prevent them, though illustrations are few. The instigating role of invention in our present era is probably due to the fact that it tends to grow like compound interest, which is not the case with attitudes, and much of our non-material culture.

Admitting that inventions are at least a strong factor in many social changes, would not social control rest somewhat on their prediction and ideational effects? It certainly is difficult to predict inventions. At the time of the Civil War who would have foreseen that we should have been talking through the air with an explorer at the South Pole? Even after an invention is made, can we anticipate the social changes it will produce? Edison could not see much use for the phonograph. That the automobile and telephone would be so effective in breaking down our cities and building up a new unit for which we do not yet have a suitable name, but which we call a metropolitan community, was not foreseen. It is not even admitted yet by government. Could we foresee and control the influence of the automobile on crime, or morals, or suburban development?

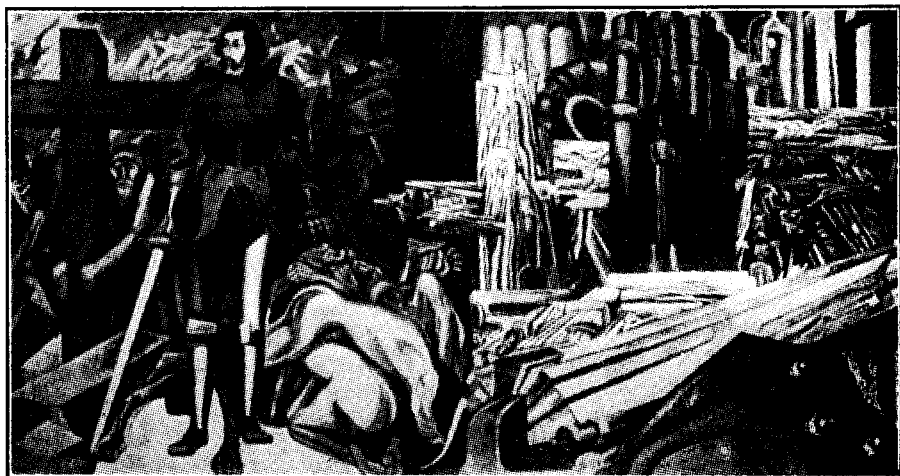
Much of our judgment on control flows from the acceptance of the idea that man created his civilization, which is not the case. The truer statement is that civilization grew, through the medium of human beings. To attribute the culture of Greece to the Greeks is mostly error. The culture of Greece grew because the Greek people happened to be the carriers of a culture which was passing through the stage of development at that time.

What we should do about the machine is a matter of judgment rather than science. It may be that strong enthusiasm and a redoubtable confidence is best. However, I have seen several idealistic movements crash like a house of cards, and the radicals take refuge in religion, science, or neurosis. There is a good deal to the attitude which asks what is likely to happen, irrespective of wishful thinking, and then says, let us see what can be done to modify these trends, making use of the forces made known by science.

William F. Ogburn, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, was a member of President Hoover's committee on social change.



ON THE WAY TO MIAHUATLAN
From "Beyond the Mexique Bay"



THE GENESIS OF THE MACHINE

Two panels from José Clemente Orozco's frescoes at Dartmouth College—from "Technics and Civilization."

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"We Do Our Part"??

Good readers who remember H. G. Wells's "Men Like Gods" will recall the discouraged sub-editor of a Liberal weekly who was so weary of the spiritual dyspepsia of his chief, named, most appropriately, Peeve, and so sunk in the lassitude of those who keep talking of the decline of civilization without doing anything about it, that only being blown into a fourth dimension could restore him to virility. Intellectuals of that kind by no means expired with the Distracted Twenties, and perhaps their continuing futility is responsible for the talk of "the poison of liberalism," on the lips of Dictators' parasites and apostles of autocracy who would like nothing better than to have liberalism stay merely peevish indefinitely.

Peevishness does seem an intellectualist's trait. Every editor of every magazine that has tried to lift its standards of criticism or creative art to levels which the intellectuals should approve, could testify to the sad fact that his severest criticism and his weakest support has come from such quarters. The list of worthy critical journals (without mentioning others) that have died in this country because their natural supporters have been more willing to criticize than to pay their fare, is portentous. Librarians think that a critical magazine, such as the *Saturday Review*, should be edited with that particular regard for conciseness in a survey of everything printed which the librarian needs in his business; scholars desire ample reviews of specialists' books and are annoyed by mention of anything popular; poets wish pages of poetry and criticism of poetry; essayists and writers of fiction a wide representation of belles lettres and away with such dull matters as finance and politics; economists ask for leading articles on the wage structure; sociologists care for nothing that lacks an obvious and current significance; and there is no scientist, man of letters, or practitioner of the fine arts who is not willing to construct a magazine of real criticism, of really important information, or really significant emphasis, on a week's notice.

But who supports the magazines which they are all so eager to criticize? Not the specialist, not the intellectual, not the artist—their names are few and far between on the subscription lists of journals intended to represent quality in our civilization, although it must be admitted that the names that do appear are of the best. The hundreds of thousands of professional in-

tellectuals in our universities, schools, foundations, literary circles, art and music groups, churches, are, as every magazine knows, the most barren field for circulation managers. Nor can the cause be said to be economic, when one considers that only a few cents a day is the consideration.

No, it is the intelligent general reader who supports our intellectual journals as it is the intelligent but not specialized citizen who supports (with more reason) our private educational system. He pays, while the others criticize. And it is his interests that deserve a consideration which specialists, each clamoring for their own wares, will not allow.

What causes this negativism in the intellectual mind? Have we who profess to be critics, scholars, artists, been pampered by an economic system that has felt us to be a luxury, until, like spoiled children whose pride has been hurt, we demand that even the luxury of self-expression for ourselves shall be paid for by others? Or is it the vanity of the intellectualist mind, which results in a refusal to play any game where we cannot make the rules, and an overmastering desire to attack our friends? One longs sometimes for the bad old days when intellectualism was a party, not an opinion and Tory criticism could count on the support of all men who thought themselves like minded.

The *Saturday Review* has been more fortunate than other journals which in the past have tried to appeal to those whose excuse for living is the importance of the imagination and the mind. Hence this attack upon the irresponsibility of our intellectuals is written out of fairness, not bitterness; is not an appeal, but a warning. When the sub-editor Barnstaple had sniffed the Utopian air, he was blown back through dimensional space into England, a more positive man, ready to cut loose from peevishness, and support, as well as talk about, his principles. We need a blast of that extra-dimensional ozone.

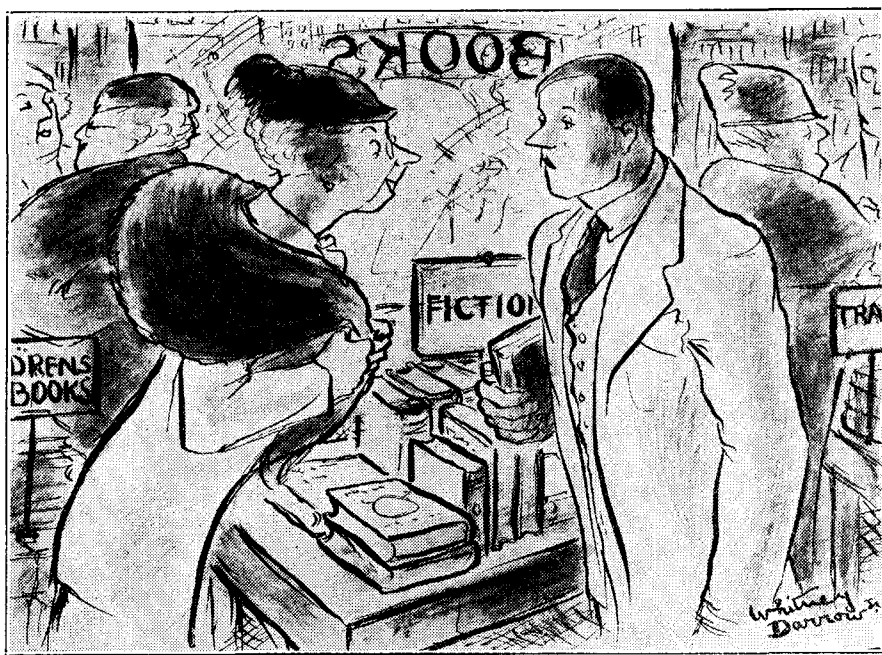
Senatorial Misconceptions

Public misconceptions about the book business are strikingly exemplified in the statement of Senator Schall of Minnesota, reported in the *New York Sun* of April 13, 1934, from which we quote:

"The President," said Senator Schall, "has very obligingly contributed, to our further dismay, a new book entitled 'On Our Way'—just where he fails to say. The public interest in this matter is in the amount of royalties paid to the author just as much as it is in the salaries and royalties paid to presidents of our industrial corporations.

"Mr. Roosevelt's first book, on his assumption to the Presidency, was sold at \$5 a copy. An author with such publicity as he should receive a 40 per cent royalty. Some one has said that 500,000 copies were sold. In this case did the author receive a royalty of \$1,000,000 which with his salary of \$75,000 would be more than any of the salaries and royalties received by the other persons he has exposed."

Hearsay evidence has seldom led to a more fantastic statement. The President's first book, "Looking Forward," was published at \$2.50. As to the sales figures and the royalty percentage quoted by the Senator, inquiries in authoritative publishing circles reveal that the publishers have not sold over 50,000 copies of "Looking Forward," and that the royalty was not over fifteen per cent. (One has only to refer to the Cheney Survey to see that percentages much above this are prohibitive.) Under these circumstances the maximum amount of royalties has been \$18,750.



"I WANT TO SEE THE MOST UNEXPURGATED BOOK YOU'VE GOT."

To the Editor: Mr. Chamberlain Replies; Dividends from Libraries

Adam Smith as a Symbol

SIR:—Mr. Fabian Franklin, in his objections to my article, "Who Killed Adam Smith?", has, I feel, made a flank attack that in no wise answers any of the questions which I wanted to raise for discussion. To begin with, the article was not limited to a discussion of Adam Smith. I spoke of the thought of "Cobden, Adam Smith, and other formulators. . . ." It remains true that Smith was taken for the prophet he proved to be (temporarily) because of the conditions which I mentioned as making for England's industrial might. If there hadn't been iron and coal under the ground in the north of England, I doubt very much that the corn laws would ever have been repealed. In which case Adam Smith, instead of becoming a symbol, would have become a nonentity. Does Mr. Franklin hold that ideas can exist apart from material circumstances? Does he deny my right to use Adam Smith symbolically (which I did, following Clark Foreman)? If he does, he certainly cuts the ground from under scores of economists who think as he does, and who are always using the name of Adam Smith to symbolize a movement in economic thought that stretches over a hundred and fifty-year period.

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN.

New York City.

Balancing the Account

SIR:—In view of the present high taxes, "The Plight of the Libraries," described by Carl H. Milam in the *Saturday Review* of Literature for March 17, seems at first glance a matter purely of social rather than economic concern.

The economic aspect of the situation, however, is one to consider. The major portion of the tax burden for current expenses goes for relief and for maintenance of thousands of human liabilities such as the sick poor and the insane.

The small amount spent on public libraries tends in countless ways to conserve and strengthen the state's human assets. Courage, stability, independence are being fostered in thousands of public library readers, according to reports made to librarians in many parts of the country. Such qualities are no mean assets, economically speaking, when their possessors make light rather than heavy demands upon society's income.

A Swedish nurse in Cleveland, for example, unemployed for a long time, watched her small savings dwindle but kept adjusting to conditions. She had always found her greatest enjoyment in books. Then her few savings were tied up entirely by the bank situation, and she could not see how she was going to adjust further. She gave up her reading and was losing her hold entirely when she found "Why We Do Not Behave Like Human Beings," an article by Ralph Adams Cram in the *American Mercury*.

What caught her eye and interested her was the statement "We do not behave like human beings because most of us do not fall within that classification." She began to investigate herself through books on psychology and found relaxation and stimulus in them.

Psychology—a subject one would ordinarily avoid as a suggestion for a person in her condition—has continued to help her to carry on. She can forget herself in

that as in nothing else. "Incidentally," she points out, "all I am learning is grist for my work when I get a case again."

In another instance, a machine-shop worker wanted "jacking up" and the readers' adviser in his public library persuaded him to take an interest in the out-of-doors. With a list of books and a list of interesting places to roam around he set out. Later he came back for a course on gardening and now lives on the outskirts of the city.

From a purely dollar and cents standpoint, is not an institution which is aiding such people—in addition to working with children, inventors, housewives, scholars, and business men who come to it daily for assistance—tending not only to balance its account but also to pay dividends to the community from which it obtains its support?

BEATRICE SAWYER ROSSELL.
Chicago, Ill.

Might Be Worse

SIR:—Being very sympathetic with Mr. Milam whose article on the plight of libraries should distress all of us, I should like very much to offer him the poor consolation—"It might be worse." If he is ever driven to melancholia because of the state of our libraries, I hope he will come to London, and try to use the Kensington Public Library. There's no use telling him about it. It must be seen.

MARGARET DE HEUSTAUMONT.

London.

"Arrogant but Pungent"

SIR: As the editor of a literary review you, no doubt, receive requests for advice from budding young critics both male and female. I should like to bring to your attention the following counsels given by W. B. Yeats many years ago to a young woman starting to write criticism. (1) Make yourself an authority on every branch of literature you write about; write about nothing which you do not know thoroughly. (2) It is advisable to adopt a masculine name, then if you are authoritative you will be called profound; but if you write authoritatively under a woman's name you may be called arrogant. These counsels were recalled to me when I read a comment by a male reviewer on three contributions of mine in "Designed for Reading," to the effect that I was arrogant but pungent. In the contributions referred to I defy anybody to find a grain of arrogance or half a grain of pungency. But the contributions were authoritative, for I had taken every sort of pains to make them so. However, if any young woman critic should persist in writing under her own name, I can assure her that if she is both interesting and authoritative, she is sure to get recognition from the first-rate men not only in criticism but in all branches of literature.

MARY M. COLUM.
New York City.

Song of a Manuscript

SIR:—O, this life is a funny scheme:

You put a stamp upon a Dream,
Sealed up within an envelope,
And drop it in a box with Hope.
You fret when mail is overdue
And watch for whistling Fate in blue!

DOROTHY MARIE DAVIS.
Pasadena, Cal.

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

A BACKWARD GLANCE. By EDITH WHARTON. Appleton-Century. Reminiscences of a distinguished novelist.

JAMES SHORE'S DAUGHTER. By STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT. Doubleday, Doran. The tale of a Yankee millionaire of the last era and his daughter.

MERCHANTS OF DEATH. By H. C. ENGELBRECHT and F. C. HANIGHEN. Dodd, Mead. Muckraking the arms industry.

This Less Recent Book:

EARTH HORIZON. By MARY AUSTIN. Houghton Mifflin. The autobiographical record of an adventurous career.