

Ideas & Studies Notes

POSITIVISM: A Study in Human Understanding. By Richard von Mises. Translated by Jerry Bernstein and Roger G. Newton. Harvard University Press. \$6. One does not usually find a chapter on poetry in books written by positivists. Positivists, in the "school philosophies" and in their textbooks, are frequently pictured as people who have no heart, no soul, no appreciation of poetry, and nothing but contempt for metaphysics. This view of the matter, however, has to reckon with Richard von Mises, whose "Kleines Lehrbuch des Positivismus" (1939) is now revised, expanded, and translated. For Von Mises positivism is a way of understanding the human situation, and the fine arts, poetry, music, and even metaphysics, since they are all forms of communication among men, can make some contribution to this goal. Although an erstwhile member of the so-called "Vienna Circle" of logical positivism, Von Mises does not subscribe to all of the strictures of this school. Indeed, he traces his positivism to the older traditions of Auguste Comte and Ernst Mach.

It is a real pleasure to have this volume now in English. Here is a brilliant and erudite mind roaming over all the fields of human knowledge from axiomatics and logistic to ethics and religion, and examining them all from the vantage of a mature and careful doctrine. In these terms the whole of ethics and of jurisprudence and all history that is not mere chronicle become branches of general sociology, a science from which more may be expected in the future than from any other. A note as short as this cannot begin to indicate the riches of a volume which, by any standard, is one of the most important contributions to philosophy in our century. The author, who is now Gordon McKay Professor of Aerodynamics and Applied Mathematics at Harvard, merits an unusual appellation, one which he himself sparingly confers on one or two others—he is a genuine polyhistor.

—ROBERT BIERSTEDT.

PARASITIC ANIMALS. By Geoffrey Lapage. Cambridge University Press. \$4. In an epode to this extraordinarily clear and sympathetic description of animal parasites and their hosts Dr. Lapage rhapsodizes: "Human beings are swayed by emotions which do not affect the beautiful trypanosome when it kills our best-beloved, nor the hookworm when it sucks our children's blood. Nor does that beautiful creature, the mosquito, consider its ways when it fills the blood of a Cromwell

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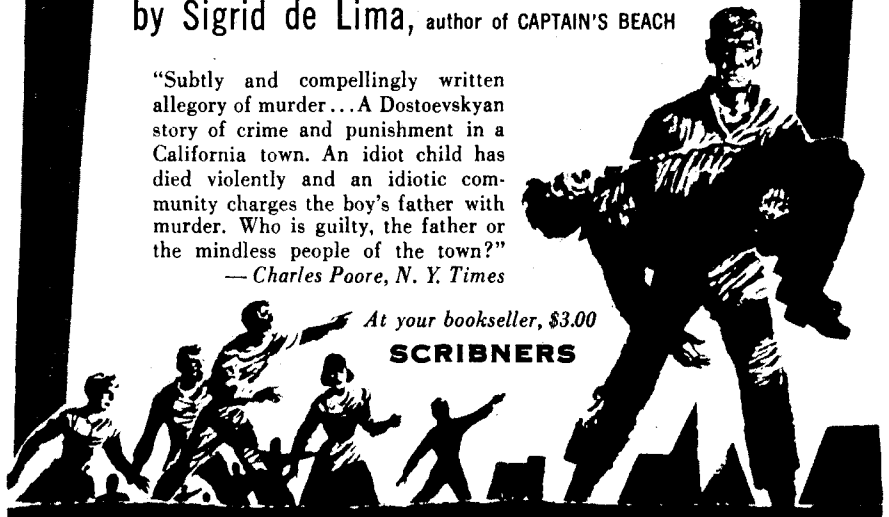
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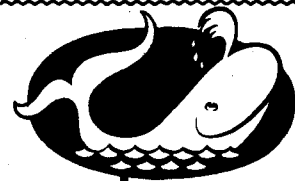
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or James I with malarial parasites. The parasitic animal follows, as other animals must, the natural urges which impel all living things to get their food, mate with their kind, and attempt to insure the survival of the species."

Beautiful to him, for detailed example, is the globular head of a tapeworm which measures less than two mm. in diameter. From that dot grows the flat, segmented worm, becoming in some bowels eighty feet long. It takes its nourishment from the host's digested carbohydrates, amino acids, and B vitamins, and hermaphroditically produces up to 150 million eggs a year. Evacuated eggs somehow reach cattle, are swallowed, hatch in the cow's small intestine, enter its blood stream, reach its muscles, where they nest and change into bodiless heads. The cow, the intermediate host, becomes beef. You eat the meat without cooking it through and through, and an unharmed tapeworm head gets into your bowel, takes hold with its four tenacious suckers, and another parasitic life cycle begins.

So it goes for a multitude of parasites living in or on their hosts. Dr. Lapage, who is a lecturer in animal pathology at the University of Cambridge, reinforces his fine text with 113 instructive, cleanly printed illustrations. Medical man though he is, he refuses to give remedies here for the human and animal diseases his parasites cause, but only because doing so might make the book too long. Some time he hopes to put into another kind of book the "especially difficult challenge" that the parasitic animal brings to the biologist who "is something of a seeker after God." Meanwhile, like a psalmist, he professes: "If the bird on the bough sing clearly of Heaven, the predatory carnivore, stealing upon it to strike it down, exhibits no less than its victim the lineaments of God. The parasitic animal, following its ways in the body of either of these creatures, must also reveal these lineaments as does also the man who observes, with anger and despair, its destruction of the beauty that he adores." —MYRON WEISS.

HISTORY AND HUMAN RELATIONS. By Herbert Butterfield. British Book Centre. \$2.50. An academic historian who writes with equal facility at the same time for both professional colleagues and the lay public is a rarity. In his latest volume of essays Herbert Butterfield, professor of modern history in Cambridge University, exhibits this talent which his readers have come to expect.

The author's belief in the Christian concept of human nature is the central

theme of the book. "In the created world," he affirms, "nothing really matters except human beings." Present tensions in the world prove that human beings, in their mutual distrust, differ only in degree not in kind. Thus diplomacy, which proclaims moral premises, more often is concerned with political ends than moral action. A fascinating essay on Official History demonstrates the manner in which a pious nationalism can pervert historical understanding—for example, by portraying the Germans as the eternal aggressors.

Only if he possesses humility and a flexible mind can the historian point the way to a better world. Ideally he ought to stretch men's minds, to challenge, to take but one instance, the un wisdom which has rendered military victory profoundly disappointing in its results. The essay on Marxist History deserves to be read widely as a fine exposition of the weaknesses (and strength) of a single schematic pattern for the whole past.

In days when strident appeals to the pretended "lessons" of history seem often to result in platitudes of self-righteousness it is good to have much calm warning of the dangers of intellectual arrogance and too narrow vision. This book from a leading historian, distinguished alike by urbanity and a fine wit, is most welcome.

—JOHN TRUEMAN.

A CENTURY OF TECHNOLOGY. Edited by Percy Dunsheath. Roy Publishers. \$5. This clearly written and informative story of a century of engineering progress was originally published as a guide to the impressive technological exhibits on display in London during last year's Festival of Britain. The eighteen experts who prepared the chapters present a unified account of the main developments that shaped the course of the Industrial Revolution. Naturally enough, they tend to emphasize the achievements of British engineers but by no means to the extent of distorting the record.

In fact, the book provides one significant instance of how developments were sometimes retarded in the struggle for new and expanding markets. Pioneer designers of "horseless carriages" made surprising advances considering that all they had to work with were steam engines of the crudest sort. As early as 1836 there was regular steam bus service between London and Paddington. The service was so successful that worried railway and stagecoach owners formed an effective lobby and Parliament passed fifty-four laws throttling "mechanical road transport" for more than half a century. The first modification of the



laws came in 1896 when speeds of no more than twelve miles per hour were permitted.

Other chapters describe developments in steel-making, chemicals and textiles, electrical engineering, food preservation, and other branches of technology. Of particular interest are chapters dealing with printing processes and navigation. The book conveys a vivid feeling for the impact of invention on society. The engineers have transformed a world, the politicians are trying to keep it in order—and the Industrial Revolution is just beginning to hit high gear.

—JOHN PFEIFFER.

APHORISMS OF C. H. MAYO AND WILLIAM J. MAYO. Collected by Fredrick A. Willius, M.D. C. C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill. \$2.75. During the half-century that the late Mayo brothers built up and operated their efficient, effective, profitable, and envied surgical-medical clinic at Rochester, Minn., they took time to publish 988 written works. The purpose of practically all was to fulfil the ever-continuing obligation of all doctors to impart their knowledge and skills to other doctors for the sake of easing suffering and curing disease. Now from that clinical tumult Dr. Willius, their staff heart specialist, has collected 215 nuggets of Mayo wisdom. These constitute the kind of bibliophilic mementos that doctors like to give one another at anniversaries.

Some of those aphorisms: "The keynote of progress in the twentieth century is system and organization—in other words, teamwork." . . . "Long ago I learned from my father to put old people to bed for as short a time as was absolutely necessary, for they were like a foundered horse, if they got down it was difficult for them to get up, and their strength ebbed away very rapidly while in bed." . . . "Judgment makes both the diagnostician and the surgeon both supermen." . . . "Once you start studying medicine you never get through with it." . . . "The ideal of medicine is to eliminate the physician." —M. W.