

An Evaluation of Darwin's Bulldog

"T. H. Huxley: Scientist, Humanist, and Educator," by Cyril Bibby (*Horizon*. 319 pp. \$5), concentrates on the protean career of the remarkable Briton rather than on his personality. J. H. Rush is now a physics consultant and science writer associated with the High Altitude Observatory of the University of Colorado at Boulder.

By J. H. Rush

TO most of us, Thomas H. Huxley is known almost exclusively as the foremost advocate of Darwin's evolutionary biology. That identification tells much about the man. Yet he was far from being merely "Darwin's bulldog," as Dr. Bibby's meticulously documented study reveals. Here was a man of prodigious energy, of brilliant intellect and tender sensibilities, a sophisticated agnostic deeply faithful to the principles he followed, a scholar exquisitely attuned to the groundswell of his times, an eminently effective man of affairs whose vision of the future was prophetic. In such a context his championing of Darwin's hypothesis fits quietly into place. It was an inevitable expression of the creed by which T. H. Huxley lived.

The biographer of such a man faces an unhappy dilemma. If he develops his subject's career in the usual chronological order, the very multiplicity of involvements and activities obscures significant patterns and relationships. If he organizes his writing around various facets of the man's interests and activities, then the thread of the subject's unfolding life and personality is likely to be lost. Dr. Bibby has chosen the latter alternative, and perhaps that is the better for the purpose. After a brief introductory chapter on Huxley as a personality, he takes up specific aspects of the man's career, following each through its entire course and then going back to detail the next.

Despite its obvious advantages, this treatment proves disappointing. True, many of Huxley's significant activities are difficult to deal with. Committee meetings, lectures, and tedious negotiations do not make for lively reading. But even the personal incidents do not seem very personal: the man never quite shows through. The author ob-



—Bettmann Archive.

T. H. Huxley with grandson Julian, 1895.

viously has devoted a great deal of research and study to his work; but the result, despite the richness of the material, has an encyclopedic dryness about it. It lacks the feel of surging vitality that must have marked the personality of T. H. Huxley. The story of a dynamic, forceful, charming man ought somehow to convey an impression of forcefulness and charm and dynamic movement to the reader—and that this book does not do.

Of content, however, there is no lack. Dr. Bibby has drawn freely from his many sources to round out a comprehensive account of Huxley's peculiarly effective role in the society of his time. As the author remarks, Huxley was a man "who above all is great because he possesses qualities which express almost perfectly the social needs of his time and enable him to serve his fellows best by being quintessentially himself." Of the possibility of such a role, Huxley seems to have been clearly aware: "I will leave my mark somewhere, and it shall be clear and distinct . . . and free from the abominable blur of cant, humbug and self-seeking which surrounds this present world. . ."

His active career spanned the period of upheaval from 1855 to 1895, during which the pressure for intellectual reorientation and social reform generated by scientific and industrial advances was

erupting into practical affairs. In a time of widespread ignorance and misery, of disillusionment with tradition and impatience with hereditary privilege, Huxley's clear-headed humanistic philosophy and his humane sensibilities both found abundant outlets.

It is curious that, like Darwin, Huxley found his direction through a somewhat fortuitous scientific voyage, in a medical post on the survey ship HMS *Rattlesnake*. This experience led him, like Darwin on the *Beagle*, into direct examination and contemplation of many diverse forms of life, and initiated the professional studies that enabled him to appreciate the Darwinian hypothesis when it was published some fifteen years later. Yet, despite his outstanding ability in biological research and the studies that he continued to publish, Huxley's major influence developed in directions of public affairs. By identifying himself positively and fearlessly with evolution and other controversial issues, he rapidly became one of the best-known figures in Britain.

Of the thirteen chapters in Dr. Bibby's account of Huxley, nine are devoted to his work in education. He was involved significantly at every level from elementary grades to the universities. He served as lecturer, board member, committeeman, examiner, rector, governor. He campaigned persistently for educational rights for women, stumped for admission of able students from all classes of society, for modernization of methods and curriculum, and especially for a more prominent place for science in the educational system.

Huxley fought unceasingly for his humanistic creed, and for its practical application. ". . . there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action, and the resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off." He regarded all theological doctrine as the enemy, and denounced it whether in the guise of dogmatic opposition to the theory of evolution or of sectarian pressures for public support of parochial schools. On such crucial issues he gave no quarter and asked none. "Those who elect to be free in thought & deed must not hanker after the rewards . . . which the world offers to those who put up with its fetters." Yet in the end he gained the respect of his opponents and more honors than most of them.

An extensive appendix in the book includes lists of Huxley's principal publications and of sources of quotations, a detailed conspectus of his life and times, and a generous index. This is an excellent reference work, despite the encyclopedic style.

The Modern Trend Toward Meaningful Martians

Science fiction has changed in recent years. No longer fabricated from the gossamer stuff of "light entertainment," increasingly SF has attracted serious readers and equally serious writers. In "New Maps of Hell" (Harcourt, Brace. 161 pp. \$3.95), SF is the subject of a thoughtful literary study by England's Kingsley Amis. Reviewed with it is "The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction" (Doubleday. 264 pp. \$3.95), edited by Robert P. Mills, an anthology whose stories illustrate Mr. Amis's theories. James Yaffe, whose novels include "Nothing But the Night," discusses what he considers alarming trends in current science fiction.

By JAMES YAFFE

THE ARTISTIC climate of our world today is strange indeed. We suffer not from too much triviality but from too little. The simple, unpretentious comic novel is no longer published; the lighthearted movie of the Thirties has given way to the turgid epic about the atomic bomb. This peculiar, and sinister, situation is nowhere more evident than in the recent developments of science fiction.

"New Maps of Hell," by the English novelist Kingsley Amis, is a serious critical study of the history, art, and philosophy of science fiction. It is an extremely entertaining book, full of witty perceptions about science and literature. Its basic thesis, however, is all too indicative of the dismal tendency of our times. Mr. Amis says that there

are two types of science fiction. First, there is what he calls the "idea" story—a kind of puzzle-game, in which the successful player starts off with some ingeniously amusing or horrifying pseudo-scientific premise, then carries it to its wildly logical conclusion. Second, there is the "serious" story, which concerns itself with the most significant sociological and ethical issues: race prejudice between Earthmen and Martians, humanity against the machine, the littleness of Man compared with the vastness of Space. It is this "serious" type of science fiction that Mr. Amis applauds most enthusiastically.

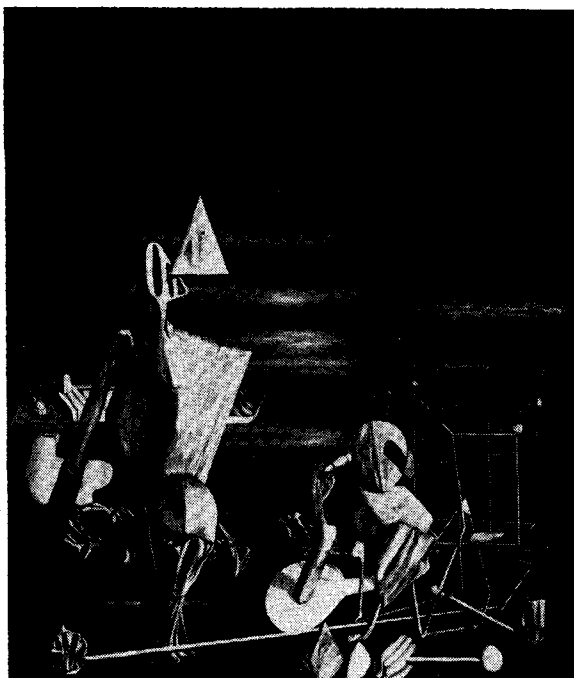
In doing so he lines himself up, it seems to me, with the forces that are gradually destroying science fiction as a genuine and enjoyable form. In its beginnings science fiction, like the detective story, was all "idea," all a game. H. G. Wells's "The Invisible Man," as Mr. Amis himself points out, is not a solemn allegory in which the hero's invisibility symbolizes the isolation of modern man; it is a fascinating series of variations on the theme "How to Catch an Invisible Man." This kind of thing is limited, of course (perhaps it isn't really literature at all) but, then, it isn't meant to be, any more than a crossword puzzle is meant to be a serious study of the structure of language. In recent years, however, the curse of pretentiousness has touched science fiction just as it has touched everything else. Science fiction has developed a snobbish attitude towards itself; it has grown dissatisfied with being merely a game. It has become "sociological" in the same way

that the detective story has become "psychological."

Writers in both forms have failed to see the trap into which they have fallen. As soon as they cease to play the game, as soon as they pretend to the stature of literature, they oblige us to judge their work by the standards of literature. The psychological detective story must be measured against "Crime and Punishment," not against "The Chinese Orange Mystery." And the sociological science fiction story must be measured against "Gulliver's Travels" and "Erewhon," not against "The War of the Worlds." Can we possibly be surprised at the results of such a measurement? In terms of originality, depth, forcefulness of style, dramatic effect, the "serious" science fiction story falls far short—for Ray Bradbury, let's face it, is no closer to Swift than Helen Eustis is to Dostoevsky.

IN an ideal world, then, science fiction would stop putting on airs and content itself with being the pleasant intellectual game it was meant to be. But it must be admitted, in all fairness, that its pretensions do serve one powerful, practical function. This is made clear in the new anthology, "The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction," edited by Robert P. Mills. Both types of science fiction are represented in this excellent collection, but the two best stories happen to be examples of the "serious" type. Daniel Keyes's "Flowers for Algernon"—in which a mentally retarded young man is temporarily turned into a genius by a wonder drug—and Lee Sutton's "Soul Mate"—in which a ruthless businessman finds himself in telepathic contact with a simple, spontaneous woman—use science merely as a convenience for getting the action started. After that they succeed for exactly the same reason that all good stories succeed, because of the power and truth of their characterizations.

The paradox is that very few recent



—The Museum of Modern Art.

Yves Tanguy's "Slowly Toward the North," 1942.