

end, and the usual type which seeks to arouse only fear, jingoism, or mere amusement. There are, I think, many willing to learn to whom a book of this kind might be a serviceable introduction. After all, the problem of arousing interest in any branch of knowledge must be faced and, although Mr. Dos Passos's method is far from perfect, it indicates a useful approach. He should be given credit, too, for his fairness ; his politics are well-known but here there is none of the hysterical narrow-mindedness that mars so many left-wing writers. He can reveal the helpless futility of the first Spanish Republican ' intellectual ' government, driven to reaction in spite of itself, without finding it necessary to stigmatize it as a group of conscious traitors and oppressors. And he is scrupulously honest about his own feelings in Russia.

It is gratifying to find a writer, not degraded by being a journalist, yet remaining an efficient one.

F.C.

LONGINUS AND ENGLISH CRITICISM, by T. R. Henn
(C.U.P., 6/-).

Lately I have had the difficult task of buying furniture. Most of the pieces I was shown seemed to me misshapen and ugly. When I protested I was told they were *modern*. Other adjectives were always to hand for anything I found it possible to praise ; and I drew a conclusion that *modern* is reserved, by furniture dealers at any rate, as a term of approval for pieces it is impossible to approve in any other way.

This crude reflection recurred to me when I read Mr. Henn's book, in which the adjective *modern* also appears. ' The purpose of the present essay,' he says, ' is to examine the ideas of Longinus in the light of *modern* critical theory.' ' " For it is not to persuasion but to ecstasy that passages of extraordinary genius carry the hearer." In this sentence rests Longinus' chief claim to *modernity*.' ' From other passages it is abundantly clear that Longinus' test is the *modern* one—the success or failure of the figure.' ' Laws and rules are alike repugnant to *modern* critics.' ' In his treatment of composition his standpoint is extraordinarily *modern*.' And so on. Perhaps after these quotations I shall not sound stupid if I say I was unable to discover from Mr. Henn's book quite what *modern* meant.

For that reason I thought of the furniture dealers ; and reflection persuaded me I was not entirely malicious in doing so. For what meaning can be given to *modern*? ' Anything which appears after a certain date is modern ' suggests itself immediately as an answer ; but suggests also the difficulty of deciding what date. Geologically speaking, I believe, the Ice Age is modern. In criticism is Aristotle modern? He is many years after the Ice Age ; but we usually think of him as the first of Western critics. Are the scholars of the Renaissance modern? Compared with Aristotle no doubt they are ; but they too are some centuries old. Is Hegel modern? Is Croce? Is Mr. Richards? Even Mr. Richards's *Principles* appeared some years ago. And towards deciding this question Mr. Henn gives no help, but rather the opposite. Almost all the critics I have mentioned are, I gather, modern to him ; at least in some aspect or other. If Aristotle is modern, any critic can be ; and the phrase ' modern critic ' on Mr. Henn's lips means only a critic of whom he approves.

That, like the furniture dealers, he approves without knowing why should be apparent, I think, on purely *a priori* grounds. For the frequent use—other than demonstrative—of *modern* implies that a slice is being cut off the rod of history. For my present point it does not matter how large or small the slice is ; since experience fails to suggest that in any slice, however small, all the happenings have any character in common. Therefore there is no such character as modernity ; and when, as he thinks, Mr. Henn is referring to it, he can only be deceiving himself, and referring, if to anything at all, then to something else. Or, if the existence of such a thing as *modernity* be admitted, we can argue in this way. Any slice of history, however small, is so rich in happenings that it is impossible for anyone to give them all attention. When he thinks he is doing so he is in reality attending to a selection from them ; and a selection made according to no rule, for the character according to which it is thought to be made is *ex hypothesi* possessed by what is passed over as well as by what is selected. Selection for Mr. Henn being approval, he is on this second count quite like the furniture dealers.

For those who are not impressed by this sort of argument, I may perhaps make one or two further quotations. ' Our successors will account,' says Mr. Henn, ' for the state of post-war

critical theory. It is interesting to speculate on the documents which will be quoted in evidence ; conjecturally we might suggest Bertrand Russell and Aldous Huxley, Sinclair Lewis and Dean Inge, D. H. Lawrence and Havelock Ellis as important determinants.' Determinants should determine some one thing ; but I confess I cannot imagine any matter of taste or speculation which these distinguished gentlemen might co-operate to determine. I am equally at a loss that it should be, as Mr. Henn complains it is, 'ironical that we can still talk of universal truth after Eddington or Einstein, Whitehead and McTaggart.' For here it is quite easy for me to imagine interminable disputes between the members of the group. On what principle has Mr. Henn formed it? I can find none that is worthy of the name.

With regard to the slicing of history, experience suggests another thing: that it is an extremely unsatisfactory method of dividing up history for consideration. For the more interesting things are found to run across the slices ; so much so that all who attempt to confine their attention to one slice do not succeed, and must look beyond. This is to the good if they recognize that they are abandoning the notion of slices, and adopt something sounder ; but if not, it can only be very bad. For they are led to claim that all interesting things occur within their slice ; just as Mr. Henn claims that Aristotle and Longinus are modern. Further, as the rule for selection beyond their slice they have only that which served them for selection within ; and we saw that that is no rule. Compare Mr. Henn on Aristotle. 'Philosophy might be defined as the best attitude or set of attitudes which the individual can produce to meet any given situation ; in this corresponding, perhaps, with the Aristotelian *philosophoteron*, the poetry which—as opposed to Plato—was to be "a more philosophical and a higher thing than history."' The only thing that Mr. Henn has selected for consideration in Aristotle is a term in his vocabulary ; the meaning of the term he has passed over. There is no principle at work here.

I began with furniture dealers because of an annoying personal experience ; but they did not begin the talk about *modernity*. I imagine the journalists did that ; to whom I might first have compared Mr. Henn, since he like them is concerned with authorship. The journalists discover modern successes, praise modern science,

teach their readers the numerous rites they must observe—a certain shape to the collar, a certain paste in the sandwiches for tea—to maintain a claim to the title *modern*. They do so because not only all they know, but all they inherit of history, is a slice. Having no obligation to the past, they can have no sense of one. Mr. Henn is not without other resemblances to the journalists—the phrase ‘and sometimes one grows weary (*or*: doubtful) of it all’ occurs twice within twenty pages; and constructions are sometimes loose—but this is the most disappointing: that for him too the past is a strange thing. He views it from far off, and like a stranger scans it eagerly for twists and outlines that are familiar. From far off the widest variety of things can seem familiar. Hence the frequency of Mr. Henn’s references to the past; hence too the fact that the greatest compliment he can pay to the past (to do him justice he is not sparing in this) is to call it *modern*.

JAMES SMITH.

A ‘SCEPTICAL’ PSYCHOLOGIST

RELIGION AND THE SCIENCES OF LIFE, by W. McDougall
(Methuen, 8/6).

Prof. McDougall has produced a book of fifteen essays which aim to ‘present matter which is likely to be of interest to the general reader’ and to have ‘a certain unity of topic and argument’ which is indicated by the title. The essays, with one exception,¹ have been written since his fiftieth birthday and so represent his ‘matured convictions.’ Prof. McDougall deals with a variety of subjects (‘Psychical Research,’ ‘World Chaos,’ ‘Eugenics,’ ‘Nationalism,’ ‘Our neglect of Psychology’), but definitely links them with the first essay which bears the book title, and so it seems important that we consider not only his opinions upheld in that essay, but also the methods by which he arrived at them. For his views: Briefly he contends that Man ‘is an active being with power to direct his strivings towards ideal goals’ which are not ‘wholly unattainable.’ This view will meet with sympathy, no doubt, from many readers, as also will the further point which he stresses, that he has been led to a position ‘more favourable to religion’ than otherwise. More important, in my opinion, is the statement that his views are the result of