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**BOOKS**

**ENGLISH SOCIAL CONDITIONS**

MARGARET McMILLAN: *A Memoir*. By D'Arcy Cresswell. Hutchinson and Co., London.

Reviewed by Ormond Wilson

**B**ECAUSE this is the first work of D'Arcy Cresswell's to be published since *Present Without Leave* in 1939, I had looked forward to it with some excitement. I was in no way, however, prepared for what I found. A memoir of Margaret McMillan, socialist and welfare worker, commissioned by the Margaret McMillan Memorial Fund, hardly seemed to offer much scope. And indeed, Margaret McMillan, as a person, emerges only indistinctly in this memoir, except in the passages quoted from her own vivid writings. The book is primarily about the world she lived in; and that is where its interest lies.

The approach is significantly different from that of Mr. Cresswell's earlier dissections of New Zealand life and attitudes. Then his vision was the vision of a poet, and if he wrote "prose" it was in the manner and with the polish of a poet. In this work there are (for admirers of those earlier writings) exquisite passages of poetic insight, which brilliantly illuminate his argument, but its primary quality is its angry and biting attack on English social conditions.

Perhaps the clue to it is to be found in the note at the beginning of *Present Without Leave*:

Here in England one finds again the same two million unemployed, the same rent strikes in Stepney, the same puppet Government and facade of good works, the same buffer Departments between rich and poor, the same charming sympathetic people who want nothing changed, the same polish and cleverness and fun on the face of things, the same fake poets, kind critics and funk-hole publicists. . . .

In the ten years since that was written those first, and perhaps superficial, observations have taken precise shape, and we have here an analysis as keen and, if you like, as one-sided, as anything written by the nineteenth century reformers. Take this:

But the great landlords had the most urgent reasons for opposing reform, and by far the most power and influence in effecting their purpose. For in addition to the industrialists and shareholders by whom the poor were defrauded of their just wages, there was, and still is, a more weird and awful kind of extortionists who (in its fear-fullest examples, though there were many less dreadful) owned vast areas of the very land whereon the working poor were crowded, which these owners never came near, but by means of agents they collected, bit by bit, and from doorstep to doorstep, along miles of reeking alleys and through oceans of unspeakable destitution, the immense fortunes which by this means they enjoyed—a wealth which lost all taint of vulgarity, and acquired the most inscrutable of alibis, on being delivered at the mansions and ball-rooms and racing stables where it was spent. It was something new in human history that usury on such a scale, and with such consequences in human misery, should be practised by gentlemen, who may even, in most instances, be allowed to have been good men, on account of their invincible illusions. For they were possessed (and are still possessed) by the illusion that their great wealth and grandeur, so indispensable to themselves, was also indispensable to the Nation. These gentlemen took their pretensions from an earlier century and their pay-rolls from this, and nothing more drastic need be asked of them, to restore them to sanity, than to reverse this extravagant misconception, and equate their pay-rolls to an earlier century and their pretensions to this.

In another passage he remarks that "the ignorance of Englishmen about living conditions and statistics in their own country amazes the inquisitive and adventurous visitor from the Dominions." It is from the standpoint of an inquisitive visitor that the book is written. Here is a work of someone who still belongs, if not typically to New Zealand, at least distinctively outside England; and, because it is from a New Zealand background that he writes, we can claim this as a New Zealand book.

Some listeners may still remember the fascinating series of broadcasts, given about 1938, in which D'Arcy Cresswell juxtaposed readings from the classics with appropriate and contrasting music. In a manner reminiscent of this technique, the memoir is illustrated by a series of most happily selected photographs which, in the same way as the book itself, give us vividly the setting against which Margaret McMillan lived and worked.



D'ARCY CRESSWELL  
*An inquisitive visitor*

he was one of our examiners in Philosophy. He was only one of the minor stars in the twentieth-century philosophical firmament, but his writings, while easy and colloquial in style, and a little rambling in form, were far from careless in thought. He wrote the Home University Library volume on *Contemporary Philosophy*. The fourth and sixth of the present series of lectures are hardly up to his best standard, but the others are.

His subject here is not (except at one or two points incidentally) any of the "four freedoms" of which we used to hear sometimes during the war, but freedom of the will. The position defended is "undogmatic voluntaristic determinism." All events, including human choices, are said to take place according to unalterable laws; but this finding is subject to correction. Professor Laird's main ground for it is that "it is desperately hard to deny causes anywhere without denying them everywhere," and no one in his senses would do the latter. He calls his determinism "voluntaristic" because he does not wish to deny that men may do as they choose, or at all events that how they choose makes a difference to what happens, and sometimes a crucial one; that is, he is not a fatalist; but how men choose is predetermined, by such things as their "character." "There is no such thing as an uncaused volition. If, *per impossible*, there were such a volition it would be a casual vagrant upsetting and not supporting moral responsibility. It would be freakish, incalculable, lonely and sporadic."

I am not sure—Professor Laird is not sure himself—that he fully understands the position he is opposing. A cautious non-determinist would agree that a reason can always be given for a man's having acted as he did. It may be "Because he thought it his duty" (though he would rather have done something else), or it may be "Because he wanted to" (though he ought to have done something else), or it may be both. But whether a man will act from duty or from preference is not (on this view) always predetermined.

This is a hackneyed theme; the position Professor Laird defends is not new, nor are his arguments for it. But he has a flair for drawing out the implications of both common speech and the slogans

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**WHAT IS FREEDOM?**

ON HUMAN FREEDOM. By John Laird. George Allen and Unwin. 7/6 net.

**PROFESSOR LAIRD** (who died while these six lectures were being printed) had a certain connection with this country. In the days when the more advanced examinations of the University of New Zealand were set and marked overseas,