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BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd.)

(continued from previous page)

preparations everywhere for a revolt against the greedy exploitation of her resources. Then the war came, and made waste take on the appearance of something very like a virtue. And now, with a general return to more normal times, Mr. Fairfield Osborn in *Our Plundered Planet* takes up the tale again and brings in the spectre of over-population to add to the frightening appearance of the spectre of waste: "The tide of the earth's population is rising, the reservoir of the earth's living resources is falling." Such is the theme.

Like the good American that he is Mr. Osborn spares us nothing—waste, erosion, over-specialisation, undue reliance on chemical stimulants, the increase of population, and the decline of human physique and much else. He begins with the words, "Yesterday morning more than 175,000 mothers looked down on the vague uncomprehending eyes of their new-born babes" and he wrings his hands over the menacing fertility of the women of India and China. He doesn't trouble us with signs of the opposite tendency in some countries, for example, in Europe and U.S.A.; but he does give an alarming account of the physical conditions of most of the young men of his own country. Altogether, he has written an interesting book—a little breathless perhaps for old-fashioned tastes—but it certainly covers a great deal of ground.

—H.M.

THE MEANING OF HISTORY

CIVILISATION ON TRIAL. By Arnold J. Toynbee. Oxford University Press, London. English price, 12/6.

ARNOLD TOYNBEE's new book may be a little disappointing to people who have read *A Study of History*. It would be unreasonable, however, to expect from a collection of essays the intellectual excitement stimulated by a massive work in six volumes, or by Somervell's masterly abridgement. Toynbee's argument has been stated in his *Study*, and the most that can be looked for in occasional writings is a simplification of his great theme, or the illumination of some parts of it by historical comparisons. Even when he writes briefly, and a little carelessly (for there is a noticeable weakening of style in the essays) Toynbee draws easily on his vast erudition. The reader finds himself lifted to new stations in space and time. He sees Europe in perspective, as a promontory of Asia; he sees more clearly the significance of maritime discovery; and he acquires a time-scale which makes human adventure seem a story in its opening chapters.

It is a little surprising, however, to notice in at least one of the essays that a historian who has charted the rise and fall of civilisations should be anxious to prove that our present culture in the west has better chances of survival than its predecessors. There is, as Toynbee himself points out, a sense in which civilisations do not die. The best achievements of mind and spirit are preserved, and have a continuing effect. None of the great religious leaders—Confucius and Lao-Tse, the Buddha, the prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammed and Socrates—

can be claimed by any of the five civilisations now in existence. This fact gives point to Toynbee's argument that the real meaning of history is to be found, not in the growth and decline of civilisations, but in the rise of higher religions. If that belief is true, it should be possible to see that the life and death cycle is as normal for nations and races as it is for individuals. Toynbee's attitude is religious, but he clings also to the hope that western culture may have unique powers of survival. It would be more logical, perhaps, to adopt the "tragic" view of human destiny, which gives hope only to the climbing spirit.

—M.H.H.

SCIENCE

PHYSICAL SCIENCE: MAN'S CONQUEST OF MATTER AND SPACE. Odham's Press. Eleven Contributors.

THIS is one of Odham's "New Educational Library." It is written in non-technical language for the interested layman. Yet it is no lightweight "popular science" sensation. It is a sober book on textbook lines, even to the self-testing questions at the end of each chapter. The applications of the branch of science under review are fully treated in each chapter. The contributors are all eminent in their fields and the book vouches for their skills in imparting knowledge. Diagrams and illustrations are a feature. The book will not open without revealing one. It may be a little carping to complain that some of them are too far from the matter they are intended to illustrate.

—J.D.McD.



THE ZB Book Review session on May 15 will be chaired by Professor I. A. Gordon, of Wellington, and one of the books to be discussed will be "Poems, 1943-47," by C. Day Lewis, whose photograph appears above. The reviewer will be A. R. D. Fairburn, and listeners will also hear a recording of Day Lewis reading one of his own poems. Other books for review are "All I Could Never Be," by Beverley Nicholls (reviewed by Anton Vogt), "The Missionary," by Cornelia Spencer (James Bertram), and "History of Otago," by A. H. Reed (A. G. W. Dunningham).

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MAY 6