

# A Great Poetic Age

THE SHAKESPEAREAN MOMENT and its Place in the Poetry of the 17th Century, by Patric Cruttwell; Chatto and Windus, English price 18/-.

(Reviewed by James Bertram)

MR. CRUTTWELL'S theory (for it is a genuine theory, worked out in some detail) of what happened to English poetry in the 17th Century, is one of those academic studies that come pat after a good deal of pioneer work by others has cleared the ground. Grierson on Donne, Eliot on Marvell and the "dissociation of sensibility," Tillyard and Leavis on Milton, are some of the obvious critical stepping-stones to this reconstruction of a great age of English literature in terms of the supreme poetry it produced.

Briefly, the thesis is that from the closing years of Elizabeth's reign until the Civil War a moment of equipoise was reached in the transition from medieval to modern times: it was a moment, with all its tensions, peculiarly favourable to a various, inclusive and highly dramatic kind of poetry, typified in the maturity of Jacobean tragedy—"both vulgar and intellectual, traditional and modernist, religious in essence but secular in form." Our own age has shown a special interest in the poetry

termed "metaphysical," but too often it has been studied in isolation, as though it were the outbreak of a rare and mysterious poetic disease. The great merit of Mr. Cruttwell's book—which is freshly written in a style that is almost too popular—is that it shows clearly what went before and what came after this moment of unified sensibility.

Beginning with a reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets that finds in them a number of clues to account for the change of manner in *Hamlet* and the later plays, Mr. Cruttwell examines the achievement of the "new-found methods" in Donne and Shakespeare: he discusses the growth of Puritanism and rationalism, the aftermath of the Civil War, and the new poetry of the Restoration—which in "Heroic Drama" returned to the mode of *Tambrlaine*, one of the simpler and cruder Elizabethan forms. A neat if not entirely watertight formula at the end is invoked to distinguish the "two great types of mind" of the 17th Century represented by Shakespeare



and Milton. The whole treatment is much broader and richer than summary might suggest, and Mr. Cruttwell is at his best on figures marginal to his main thesis, such as Beaumont and Lord Herbert of Cherbury. This is a stimulating if sometimes irritating book, which no student of the period can afford to neglect.

## GENETICS AND SOCIETY

THE FACTS OF LIFE, by C. O. Darlington; Allen and Unwin, English price 35/-.

THE first half of this important book is concerned with the history leading to the modern theories of genetics. It sets forth the necessary scientific background for what is to follow. The remainder is a study of man—man alone, and in society, and the relations of men and women. A theory of life, linked with recent discoveries in genetics, is expounded. This involves the author in a biological view of history. Out of the whole emerges a philosophy of determinism, largely based upon a denial of the plasticity of the individual person. For Darlington the adaptability of man depends on the variability of the species. The reader will find great store set on variation in determining selection; which leads, naturally, to an analysis of the mechanism of evolution. By corollary, the sterile heredity versus environment controversy is disposed of.

Those interested in education or the law may need to reconsider some of the theories on which their studies are built.

Individual plasticity is revealed as an illusion, as indeed it must be if genetic research is to be trusted. Yet current education theory, still somewhat under the influence of Freud, and opinions on the punishment (or reform) of criminals, assume the contrary. Similarly it follows that great differences in capacities or in social attitudes are determined by heredity. What one learns is not inherited, but the capacity to learn is. The effect is seen when the individual person is faced with a choice of environment. This disposes, at one blow, of Freud's vitalism, the pressures of over-ambitious parents, and those who talk of "free will."

Darlington's analysis of sex differences should be carefully considered. These are so great that the sexes, even in what appears a common environment, lead separate lives. This is not to condemn co-education. Each takes from, and gives to, the environment according to need and capacity. The author succinctly points out that all obstacles to relations between the sexes are encouragements to relations within the sexes.

The section on crime is the weakest part of the book, not because of any lack of interest, but because Darlington here accepts and uses methods which elsewhere he condemns. In other places, too, there is sometimes a little straining to fit awkward observed data into the neat deterministic framework. There are a few other minor faults. His passing reference to the Kinsey Report is not



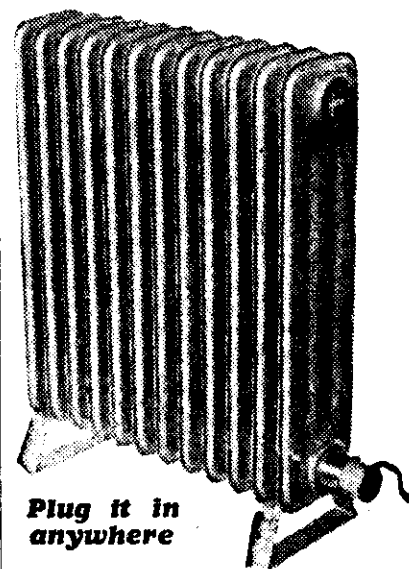
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