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## BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

power of his mind he touched little that he did not illuminate. He was among the first to recognise that irregularity is in the nature of things, and hence he was in the forefront of the movement towards a mathematics based on imprecise terms.

Many branches of science and technology are in his debt and it is probably this portion which will interest the general reader. He was involved in major research in anti-aircraft predictors, radar, television, sociology and biology. He was a willing collaborator in spite of his reputation for insufferable self-sufficiency. But most of us know him best as the father of automation, and the reader may well be touched by his sincere concern for the social consequences of his work. Anyone genuinely desirous of understanding the bases of automation should read carefully the section on

"feed-back" and then read Cybernetics and The Human Use of Human Beings, both by this author.

No autobiography is successful unless one feels one knows the man better because of reading his book. Wiener's tale is simply told. On occasion the chronicle is small beer. Apart from his father, scarcely another portrait emerges even though he met on equal terms most of the great of our time. The immense capacity to separate the few essentials of a problem, which has served Wiener so well in his scientific work, is here a handicap. The reader will miss the peripheral view.

—J.D.McD.

## THE OTHER BROWNING

VICTORIAN ETON AND CAMBRIDGE, being the Life and Times of Oscar Browning, by H. E. Wortham; Arthur Barker, English price 21/-.

THOSE who know Cambridge history will remember as one of the most colourful personalities fifty years ago and more, the don called "O.B." Oscar Browning, a history Fellow of King's, became a legend, and much more of a public figure than many a don above him. He strode through life with élan; a lover of good food and wine; so devoted to music that he was still taking piano lessons at over eighty; blend of egotist, hedonist and idealist; touchy and affectionate; a helper of lame dogs, including waifs; always happy among the young; chronically hard up; and a prodigious talker. Dismissed from his master's post at Eton, a grave blow, he took refuge in Cambridge, where he made the history school at King's the best in England.

Much of the detail of his stormy career amid school and university politics (he never got preferment) told in this reprint of a book published in 1927 has little interest for overseas readers, but there emerge some important facts, and the author remarks in a new preface that questions of morals and curricula raised in the record are still with us. The Eton of Browning's schooldays and mastership was part of the hard public school core of unrelieved classicism uncovered by the 1861 commission, and his revolt against this regime was a factor in his dismissal. He fought passionately for a more liberal education, and specifically wanted to educate the aristocracy decently. This picture of Eton moves me to wonder how many of England's military and diplomatic battles may have been lost in its classfooms

In Cambridge he put new life into the study of history, which he regarded as a basis of statesmenship, led the movement for a Teachers' Training College, championed the cause of women, and was a pioneer in adult education. He wrote history, but his ambition to be a great historian was not realised. Where he left his mark was on the crowd of students he taught formally, and informally as their host. It is as a professor of enthusiasm, a reformer, and a "character," that he deserves to be temembered.

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