

# THE MAN INSIDE

THE HUMAN PROSPECT, by Lewis Mumford; Secker and Warburg, N.Z. price 21/-.

(Reviewed by Henry Walter)

THIS, we are frequently reminded, is the age of the Outsider who, seeing about him only chaos and moral disintegration, finds what bitter solace he may in a struggle for individual salvation. But what of the sensitive Insider, refusing to contract out, insisting on adding mankind's burden to his own? Clearly, events have paved the way for a restatement, if not the reinstatement, of the humanist approach to world affairs in the light of the atomic era. The finger which probed to the heart of the atom has blown sky high the assumption, rooted in Newtonian physics, nurtured in utilitarianism and culminating in the bloodless ideology of the machine, that society consists of various organisms, of which man is the highest form, crawling about a vast mechanical contrivance in a clockwork universe. Human ecology has forced its way back into the natural sciences. But have we still time before ultimate disaster to reduce the machine to the status of an essential element, but not the dominating element, of our culture?

Nobody is better qualified to assess, or to reflect, the humanist's point of

view than Lewis Mumford, teacher, town planner, art critic and America's most civilised social observer. Although he sharply disclaims the label of humanist or any other philosophical tag, it is with that warm current of history, more than any other, with which he is plainly most in sympathy. *The Human Prospect* is an anthology drawn from his writings on many subjects over a period of thirty years, deliberately selected and arranged to present his life's work as a coherent whole.

One cannot help being struck by the essential fullness of Mumford's personality; his development has not been so much forward as outward. Like the Outsider, he sees the signs and symbols of our time—monumental architecture surrounded by crumbling slums, the tortured convolutions of non-objective art, the social sterility of family life—as a background for moral nihilism. But unlike the Outsider, he senses the groundswell of a reaction which will replace purposeless materialism with a new concept of the dignity and potential of man for good.

The clearest light on Mumford's social philosophy is cast by his essays on the men whose lives and works have affected him deeply. Melville, Whitman, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred North Whitehead and, above all, the quaint, impetuous, supremely lovable figure of the late Sir Patrick Geddes. Such men, he believes, were the focal points of a basic change of orientation which has been slowly taking place in our civilisation since the third quarter of the 19th century. The increase of collectivism, the rising of municipal and government housing, the expansion of consumers' and producers' associations, the attack on slums and the building of superior types of community for work-

ers—in short, the concept of the welfare state—are all signs of a new biotechnic attitude toward society. Whereas the pecuniary economy expands the role of the machine, the biotechnic economy enlarges the role of the professional services, the teachers, architects, scientists, musicians and artists. The shift has been gathering momentum during the last generation, but its significance has been obscured by the powerful forces of disintegration with which it is at cross purposes.

Mumford gives little comfort to Europeans who console themselves with the thought that their own cultures are not afflicted to the same degree with America's deep-seated contradictions. "In Europe, the 'New World' is still partly concealed under the debris of history." "An American is nothing but a European stripped of the historic garments of his culture." The problem is basically the same for us all.

This book would be important purely for its closely reasoned analyses of our social development and behaviour, but it will mean far more to those who refuse to believe that our choice of ends is limited to annihilation, continuous chaos or a mechanical society. There is another goal toward which we can move: unconditional co-operation, illumined on the one hand by a scepticism of systems and on the other by an affirmation of organic life. If Mumford's faith that man can achieve it is ingenuous, it is also clear, unequivocal and refreshing.

## HEADHUNTER AND KILT

BORNEO PEOPLE, by Malcolm MacDonald; Jonathan Cape, English price 32/6.

THE distinguished representative of His Majesty King George VI (in ceremonial costume) was bringing some-

thing of the culture of his homeland to the hill natives of Borneo. What was he doing? Why, dressed in his kilt (after all, it was his tribal costume, too), he was having an hilarious time teaching the Iban tribesmen of Sarawak in the Great Hall of their Long House how to play—blind man's bluff! It became their favourite sport.

Malcolm MacDonald has a reputation as an administrator of Malaya and Sarawak, and in this book he describes the people of Sarawak not as a cultural group, or indeed as anything so impersonal, but as individuals whom he came to know intimately, and indeed to love. The change in their lives as westernised culture comes to separate father and child over such apparently trivial things



MALCOLM MacDonald

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