

ELEMENTS OF AN INDUSTRY



In daily speech the word "element" is too often used wrongly or carelessly. "The elements" suggest "the weather," and "elementary" something easy or simple. To men of science, however, an element describes any substance which cannot be split up into a simpler one by ordinary chemical methods. A dictionary definition is that an element is "the simplest known constituent of all compound substances". This recognition is based on a theory first propounded by Robert Boyle, a British chemist, in 1661. In all nature there are only ninety-three of these "Elements". From these are built up every single thing we eat or use or see. The function of the chemical industry is to discover how to separate elements which in nature exist in a combined form, to find out how they can be made to combine into substances useful to man, and then to evolve methods of making them do so "to order" on a commercial scale.

The degree of success which this great industry has attained may be judged from the fact that Imperial Chemical Industries alone uses 50 or so of the elements known to science to make no fewer than 12,000 different products.



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Book Reviews

(continued from previous page)

Matthews will follow it with a companion book dealing with the more common small trees and shrubs. —J.

THE SENSE OF HISTORY

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF WORLD HISTORY, by René Sédillot, translated by Gerard Hopkins; Harrap. English price, 12/6.

It would be hard to imagine a better 270-odd pages for the general reader who wishes to improve his understanding of the activities of human beings in social, national, and political groups, of the circumstances surrounding the rise and fall of leaders and governments, "thrones, dominations, virtues, princdoms, powers." Historical parallels are more clearly seen when shorn of detail; and it is surprising how many there are. Ancient Egypt was a collectivist, authoritarian, and bureaucratic state; the picture in *Genesis* means much more when we find a comparison made with the U.S.S.R. But it is saddening to find how seldom, if ever, we find true democracy when systems of government in the past are analysed.

Too many children, it must be admitted, leave school in this country with the impression that history began when Julius Caesar discovered Britain (although the Romans had previously been devising a suitable system of law and government, the Greeks a suitable culture, and the Jews a suitable religion). After that, it would seem, Rome faded out of the picture and a period began in which everything was invented, discovered, or in the long run dominated by the inhabitants of that island, their associates and offspring overseas. Were pupils shown more clearly the earlier cultural and political European hegemonies of Italy, Spain, and France before Britain's far-reaching 19th Century ascendancy they would have a far more real sense of the British contribution to European civilisation and the part that her culture can play in the changing situation today. At any rate, English history is taught in far too great detail to

be remembered satisfactorily by those who do not devote further attention to it, and broader studies of this kind are more likely to have a lasting effect on the average pupil.

In a book so condensed the reader may often look in vain for a view from the author's position of events which have particular interest for him. But there is room for a good deal of shrewd, lively, sometimes dogmatic Gallic opinion, and opinion is probably more necessary to enliven a condensed than a full account. Any academic critic who takes exception to this attempt should be in honour bound to go and do better, for such a book is needed. —Walter Brookes

UNCERTAIN GUIDE

CONSCIENCE AND REASON, by Grace Stuart; Allen and Unwin. English price, 15/-.

GRACE STUART believes that conscience is the product of social pressure on the individual. The greatest need, she says, is to give and receive love; and this need is too often frustrated by the sense of guilt. If men could rely less on the ideas of guilt and punishment, and more on reason, with an emphasis on love and approval instead of judgment, we might still learn to be human.

The argument is stated clearly and vigorously. If, however, we must create a new kind of super-ego (for Miss Stuart adopts the Freudian concept), we are merely being asked to make a new kind of society in which morality will be influenced by more enlightened methods in the training and treatment of children. And this does not seem to be very different from what men of goodwill have always been trying to do, though not necessarily because they share Miss Stuart's beliefs.

A suspicion remains that man, being what he is, will retain the connection between conscience and guilt, no matter how enlightened his society may be. All that may change is the scale of values, the standards of good and evil, by which his conduct is judged. In other words, conscience is active for different reasons in different ages and cultures, but its nature remains unchanged. —H.

KERSH AND OTHERS

THE THOUSAND DEATHS OF MR. SMALL, by Gerald Kersh; Heinemann. English price, 15/-.
MADAME SERPENT, by Jean Plaidy; Robert Hale. English price, 10/6.
IMMORTAL WHEAT, by Kathleen Wallace; Heinemann. English price, 12/6.
FRIGHT IN THE FOREST, by Benn Sowerby; Rupert Hart-Davis. English price, 10/6.



JOHN REECE COLE, who will review two novels, "Constancy," by Phyllis Paul, and "Moirá," by Julian Green, in the ZB Book Review session on December 16. Other books and reviewers will be "Killers All," by Attilio Gatti, and "Unlocking Adventure," by Charles Courtney (O. N. Gillespie); "The World Cannot Hear You," by Gwyn Thomas (Nelle Scanlan); and "Long Innings," an autobiography, by Sir Pelham Warner (the Rev. E. O. Blamires)

THE best of this ill-assorted bunch is Gerald Kersh's lengthy recreation of a Jewish family milieu of a monstrous and fascinating vulgarity. It is his most deeply-felt and personal novel—and probably his best. At the top of his hog-calling voice and with a wealth of scatological humour, he describes the domestic strife of Yisroel Small (né Schmulowitz) and his wife, as seen by their self-tormenting son, Charles. It is as if James Joyce had rewritten *Tales from the Ghetto* in collaboration with a circus clown. Solly Schwartz, the Machiavellian hunchback who becomes a business tycoon, is a striking creation, at once comic and repulsive. This is a memorable, sordid novel, stinking with life, almost overpowering in its energy — the unique product of a rich and exasperating talent.

Madame Serpent is a conscientious novel about Catherine de Medici. In its explanation of the ambivalence of this remarkable Queen of France through a

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