

# 25,000 POST-MORTEMs

BERNARD SPILSBURY, HIS LIFE AND CASES, by Douglas G. Browne and E. V. Tullett; Harrap. English price, 21/-.

(Reviewed by F. J. Foot)

MOST of us are confident that we will be present at no autopsy unless it is our own. Sir Bernard Spilsbury conducted 25,000 post-mortems, and this is an account of the more famous criminal cases in which he was engaged and of his methods, and tells us something of the man himself. It is highly readable and of most satisfyingly macabre interest.

Spilsbury was the most famous medical jurist of our day. He was a remote man of few friendships, immersed in his work to the extent of being almost a machine. Nevertheless stories of his courtesy and kindness are legion. Sometimes he incurred unpopularity with his colleagues and some jealousy. It may be said that the unpopularity was undeserved, but that the jealousy was natural. The thoroughness of his work, his scrupulous fairness, clarity and accuracy made his evidence of the greatest value in the administration of justice. The authors have done their best to dispel the rather humourless remoteness which surrounded the man

himself. There are a number of personal details and anecdotes. He disliked physical contacts, back slapping, etc., liked classical music, had little sense of smell and in his younger days was addicted to the society of older men.

The authors take the fashionably sympathetic view of Edith Thompson (Rex v. Bywaters and Thompson), though why they should think her delight in making chutney and jam inconsistent with her murderous propensities is mysterious. Indeed, as Alexander Woollcott pointed out, the two are inclined to be linked.

Some other well-known cases are dealt with at length; that of the prisoner Armstrong, who claimed that he disliked dandelions so much that he made up individual packets of arsenic for each one; and the murderer Tunbridge, who was so lacking in a sense of what is fitting that he pushed his victim into the River Lea in the presence of a police sergeant.

The story is told that at a dinner one night Spilsbury was asked by the hostess to carve the partridges, with the remark that he should be good at it. He said, "Do you know, I really prefer always to use my own instruments. Oddly enough, I have them here." To which his hostess rejoined, "Oddly



SIR BERNARD SPILSBURY  
"I always prefer to use my own instruments"

enough, I don't think I could eat the partridges if you used them."

**PRODUCTION v. REPRODUCTION**  
**HUMAN FERTILITY: THE MODERN DILEMMA.** by Robert C. Cook; Victor Gollancz. English price, 21/-.  
**FOUR THOUSAND MILLION MOUTHS.** edited by F. Le Gros Clark and N. W. Pirie; Oxford University Press. English price, 12/6.

THESE books are not complementary, as their titles may suggest they are. The first certainly deals with the prob-

lem of the ever-increasing world population and diminishing food resources, describing the familiar example of Puerto Rico as a "condensed object lesson" and applying the warning to Japan. But the author, who is editor of the American Journal of Heredity, is even more concerned with the decreasing level of innate intelligence and of other desirable genetic qualities which is being brought about in the United States and in the United Kingdom by the relatively lower rate of reproduction among people in the more highly skilled and educated occupational groups. "Today, in the United States, the intelligent get degrees, and the diligent and competent get houses and bank accounts and stomach ulcers; But it is the poor and unschooled who beget." Considerable space is given to accounts of the early arguments about evolution, the Huxley-Wilberforce duel, and the more recent Scopes trial in Tennessee and the Ly-senko controversy—all very interesting but relevant chiefly as illustrating the slow growth of informed public opinion.

The second book is a series of twelve essays by leading British authorities under the sub-title "Scientific Humanism and the Shadow of World Hunger." Each deals with some aspect of the restoration of "that uneasy balance between food and population which the engineer and the doctor have upset." One of the most interesting is that on the circumvention of waste of products both animal and vegetable, and the pro-

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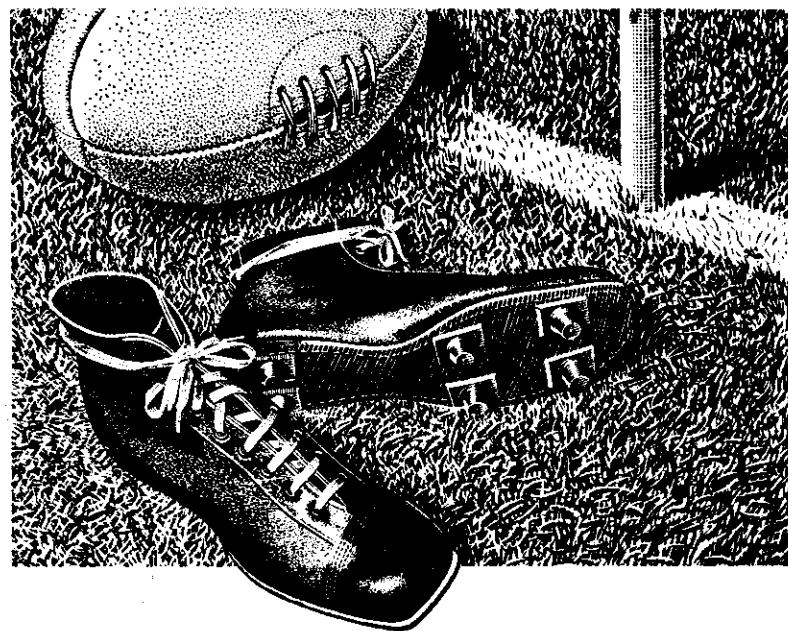
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