

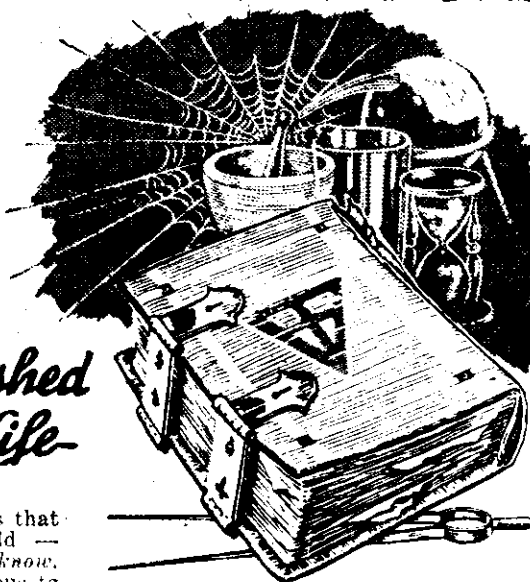
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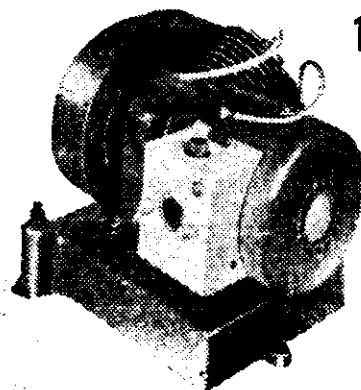
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BOOKS

The Return of Malthus

THE MALTHUSIAN THEORY, by G. F. McCleary; Faber and Faber, English price, 45s.

(Reviewed by Walter Brookes)

WHEN Thomas Robert Malthus published the first edition of his Essay on the Principle of Population in 1798 he aimed to show contemporary Utopian visionaries the danger of neglecting the relation of the size and increase of population to the production of subsistence. This book of 55,000 words finally, in 1826, became a treatise of 200,000 words, in which the subject was treated historically and geographically in the light of diligent reading and travel undertaken by the author.

He was rewarded with a great deal of misunderstanding, which Dr. McCleary, himself a writer on population problems and social welfare, attempts to clear away. Malthus considered that the impulses which led to reproduction were so strong that population would always tend to run ahead of the means of subsistence; the checks that kept it within bounds were "moral restraint, vice and misery." So little did he discuss contraception, with which his name has been associated, that Dr. McCleary suggests that he included it under the heading of vice—a threat to desirable increase of population. Moral restraint, incidentally, meant postponement of marriage—in chastity.

Much of the argument that has gone on about specific details in the Essay is surely very unprofitable. The potential rate of population increase if unchecked, the rate at which human inventiveness and industry could improve the production of the means of subsistence as posited by Malthus, must be subject to continual modification as science advances. Good health and long life are not absolute terms in the consideration of population growth; and in the consideration of the means of subsistence it is obvious that some hitherto unthought of development such as the synthetic production of food may upset existing hypotheses completely.

What matters is the general approach to the subject made by Malthus and his

detailed studies of the material available to him. The importance of the subject today, when the birthrate of some Western nations and their colonial settlements overseas is decreasing (the rise during the war was only temporary) and that of other nations and races is rising, can hardly be denied.

RENAISSANCE MAN

SELECTIONS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI, edited with commentaries by Irma A. Richter; Oxford University Press (the World's Classics), English price, 5s.

THE genius of Leonardo da Vinci has been held to be representative of the spirit of the Renaissance—diverse, vital and emphasising the dignity of man. The first two qualities are certainly apparent in this selection from his notebooks; but the bent of his mind would seem to be, if anything, anti-humanist. As in Chinese and Japanese painting, man occupies a minor functional position in the order of things. The laws which govern the movements of air and water interest him more than the actual fate of people swept away by a deluge; the balance of stresses in the arch of a bridge, more than the peasants who walk across it. He invented diving suits, helicopters, machine-guns; but their function concerned him more than the social use, good or bad, to which they might be put. In this, he is undoubtedly representative of the main tradition of modern thought. The kind of comment he does make on human nature is clearest in negative matters: "Avarice: The toad feeds on earth and always remains lean, because it never satisfied itself—it is so afraid lest it should be without earth."

His preoccupation with imminent apocalyptic disaster seems to lie at the centre of his study of natural phenomena: I venture that opinion. But however repellent and strange the gist of his arguments, there is no doubt that his cold curiosity and scientific objectivity give an unequalled range to his understanding of natural order. In a time when men imagined that fossil shells were created by the agency of the stars, he argues cogently for a different origin; he develops theories of perspective, of precipitation and evaporation, of flight and motion, all from strict observation of Nature. Nature is his deity, benignant or malignant. This selection from his works, cheaply priced, is likely to be a source of interest and admiration to many readers.

—James K. Baxter

ZEALOUS PERSUADERS

THE SHOCKING HISTORY OF ADVERTISING, by E. S. Turner; Michael Joseph, English price, 15s.

NO advertising man today would push coffee as a remedy for consumption, dropsy, gout, scurvy, the King's Evil and hypochondriac winds. Nor would he caution purchasers of a hair restorative to keep it off the backs of their hands lest they grow hairy paws. Oh, no! Since these and similar exhortations appeared (in the 17th Century) advertising has kept in step with civilisation's advance. Nowadays, the advertiser's zeal for gracious living can always be supported by scientific proof. Items like the combined tooth-brush and tongue-scraper (with the patented vacuum-action groove which sucks out harmful bacteria), and the hand-lotion that washes



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