

REVIEWS

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE MODERN WORLD. By Arnold S. Nash. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

The title of this book is rather misleading. Its general thesis appears to be that the modern world has reached a cultural crisis through the development and collapse of scientific individualism; that Nazis and Marxists have met the situation with a correct diagnosis but with remedies worse than the disease; and that it remains for Christian thinkers to rescue liberal democracy from itself by integrating it into a coherent scheme of things. German and Russian universities most clearly exemplify the errors of their systems; the university of the future is to exemplify the new Christian synthesis.

I hope that so far I have not misrepresented the author. On the details of his argument I comment with diffidence, for I am often uncertain what he is trying to prove or where his destructive and his constructive criticism divide. His use of English does not assist the struggling reader (at one point he produces the term 'bi-verse' as antithesis to 'universe'). And though his publishers commend him as the possessor of 'graduate degrees in chemistry, philosophy and sociology,' it is plain that his accomplishments here are not equally distributed. In philosophy he has certainly not got far; he has not even got far in what Americans call 'philosophy appreciation'—witness his frequent distortions of mediaeval thought.

His most general defect is the incomprehension of all that is meant by the hierarchy of knowledge. He constantly inveighs against the isolation of the physical sciences from other forms of knowledge, and shows, as many have shown before him, that the physicist in making judgments is bound to rest ultimately on metaphysical principles. But he fails to draw the obvious conclusion. Writing with an egalitarian bias and with a distrust of superior rights which does not distinguish between checking conclusions and dictating conclusions, he seems to suggest that every scientist is an unconscious metaphysician and that all that is needed is the recognition of a fraternal bond between the two forms of knowledge. To clear such vapours—and much of the modern mist in general—there could be no better preliminary than the thorough study of the traditional three degrees of abstraction. Since Mr. Nash more than once refers to Maritain, it may be worth pointing out that Maritain has several times stated the classic thesis on the matter—e.g. in his *Introduction*, his *Réflexions sur l'Intelligence*, and his *Degrés du savoir*—and has elaborated it with a scheme of the sciences which would greatly illuminate the questions discussed in this book. Mr. Nash's own alternative is the collaboration of all Christian scholars, 'natural scientists, social scientists, historians, philosophers, literary

critics, and the like,' to create a Christian *speculum mentis* of apparently democratic character. Theology will perhaps be somewhat privileged; I am not sure. In any case it 'must be related to and illuminated by the wider setting of man's knowledge of the universe in which it will occupy its appropriate position, but also to which it gives ultimate meaning.'

I note briefly three major errors in Mr. Nash's judgments on Thomism: (1) that it admits no new facts; (2) that it considers the human reason a perfect machine for infallibly finding truth; (3) that it makes a fundamental distinction between *psyche* and *pneuma* in the human individual. The most cogent refutation of these positions is to be found in St. Thomas himself, but answers couched in more modern terms are available in plenty. For Mr. Nash's specific difficulties I should recommend the works of Maritain cited above, the *Sens du mystère* of Garrigou-Lagrange, and Father D'Arcy's *Thomas Aquinas and Nature of Belief*.

I have stressed adverse criticisms because the author's pretensions asked to be challenged. It is only fair to add that the book has much of interest in it, shows sense and acuteness at many points, and should disturb the complacency of scientists of the Wellsian kind.

WALTER SHEWRING.

BRIDGE INTO THE FUTURE. Letters of Max Plowman. Edited by D.L.P. (Andrew Dakers; 25s.)

In one of these letters Max Plowman says: 'I can express ideas easily and happily in letters to intimate friends; but when I come to the formal expression of them then a veil comes down between me and the paper and I find myself trying to write in epigrams or else writing with a kind of loose irrelevancy that is like the trickle of skimmed milk.' I incline to share the second judgment (the two books which had come my way before were certainly disappointing); I am happy to share the first also. These letters show Plowman at his best, and their seven-hundred-odd pages are an excellent introduction to him in all those activities for which he came to be known—as pacifist, as interpreter of Blake, as editor of the *Adelphi*, and as founder of the Langham agricultural community.

The book is bound to make one admire the man; courage, sincerity, affection, intelligence are visibly impressed on it. Yet there is much in him that I still do not understand. In a small way, for instance, I am puzzled by his verdict on the *Testament of Beauty* as 'probably the greatest book that's been printed in my lifetime'; I should think the opinion odd in anyone, but I find it specially odd in him—the rest of his critical opinions do not prepare one for it. More importantly, his intense distrust of the Catholic Church seems hard to explain completely. 'It is known by its fruits—which are horrid!' The sentiment is familiar, but it comes strangely from a profoundly religious man who venerated English cathedrals and