

A PHYSICIST LOOKS AT WORLD AFFAIRS

Out of my Later Years

By Albert Einstein. Pp. viii+282. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950.) 4.75 dollars.

THIS book is a collection of essays, written by Einstein during the period 1934-50, a continuation of the similar work, "The World as I See It", which covers the years 1922-34. Only a small part of the sixty articles deals with science and its philosophy; others give the author's opinion on the relation of science to religion and to life in general, on moral problems, on politics and the social problem, on the Jewish people and their fate.

It is impossible to give in a few lines an impression of the fascinating and inspiring ideas, expressed in the simplest possible language, which are contained in these essays. A few points may, however, be mentioned. The fourth article, of the year 1937, has the title "Moral Decay", and this term appears later again and again, as a kind of *Leitmotiv*, in all articles dealing with the present political situation, the atomic bomb, the treatment of the Jews, etc. The eighth article, "Science and Religion", contains again a confession which returns in many others: that intelligent thinking plays no part in forming a goal for human endeavour and for ethical convictions—"To make clear these fundamental ends and valuations . . . seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man". What Einstein means by that, becomes clear enough from the following considerations: the principles of the Jewish-Christian tradition, which he always, also in other articles, regards as a unit. But just as strong as his acceptance of these "principles"—obviously the ethical teachings of the prophets and of Christ—is his rejection of the belief in a personal God. This opinion is offered in the most simple and humble way as the result of a life's experience and thinking; it is not without connexion with Einstein's deepest scientific convictions.

There are two main articles dealing with these, No. 13 from 1936, and No. 14 from 1940. They reveal much about Einstein's ultimate principles and methods. Every physicist will read them with the greatest interest, as they show how it has come about that Einstein has separated himself from the general trend of modern physics. The summary of No. 13 gives his epistemology in the shortest terms: "Physics constitutes a logical system of thought which is in a state of evolution, and whose basis cannot be obtained through distillation by any inductive method from the experiences lived through, but which can only be attained by free invention". It is just this trust in the power of *a priori* thinking which has led Einstein away from the actual physical research into lofty speculations which have so far little relation to reality. No. 14 contains a clear explanation of the logical situation in quantum theory and of Einstein's objections to the generally accepted statistical interpretation. But this attack is of a milder kind than has ever before come from his pen; it leaves "open to every man to choose the direction of his striving", and it ends with "Lessing's fine saying, that the search for truth is more precious than its possession".

The articles grouped under the titles "Public Affairs" and "Science and Life" show Einstein as a political, social, ethical humanitarian thinker. No. 18

is a confession of socialism, but in No. 31 there is a warning, directed to the blind believers in the social paradise: "Socialism may lead more easily to wars than capitalism because it represents a still greater concentration of power". This problem of war is his main concern, and he sees no other way out but a world government, which he defends and recommends with strong words in many articles, of which No. 31 is the most important one. To this group belongs also his exchange of open letters with four Russian men of science (No. 27) who attack "Dr. Einstein's mistaken notions" by a display of the well-known communistic arguments; Einstein's reply is a model of simple reasoning: first things first—what advantage do you expect from even the most perfect social system if you perpetuate international anarchy with the inevitable consequence of atomic war and general annihilation? War and the military mind are Einstein's real enemies which he relentlessly attacks, for example, in No. 36. But his disgust about the military expression "human material" and the degradation produced by military discipline does not make him a blind pacifist. He appeals to the civilized world to resist aggression, to answer force by force, if necessary, to save its most precious possessions. His words about the suffering of the Jews, "his people", are as moving as his pride in the foundation of a Jewish State.

Einstein's lovable personality, however, is best revealed in some short biographical essays, beginning with Newton and Kepler and leading to Gandhi and Ossietzky (Nos. 38-46). It is not only the achievements of these men which he describes in a masterly way, but also their human greatness. The short sketches dedicated to the memory of Marie Curie, Max Planck, Paul Langevin and Paul Ehrenfest are touching documents of Einstein's devotion to his friends.

MAX BORN

A STUDY OF SOME ODD PERSONALITIES

Very Peculiar People

Portrait Studies in the Queer, the Abnormal and the Uncanny. By Dr. E. J. Dingwall. Pp. 224+11 plates. (London: Rider and Co., n.d.) 18s. net.

DR. E. J. DINGWALL has two qualities which make his writing eminently readable: an intense interest in human beings and a profound and unusual scholarship. These qualities are aptly united in this book and its forerunner, "Some Human Oddities", in both of which he makes critical and exploratory studies of strange people and extraordinary happenings. In "Very Peculiar People", Dr. Dingwall considers Emanuel Swedenborg, Johann Jetzer, a seventeenth-century monk around whom centred amazing events, St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, Hadrian Beverland, a Dutch scholar addicted to classical erotica, and Eusapia Palladino, an Italian medium of uncertain authenticity.

In three of these brief biographies the main problems are those of psychical research, and the author, without assaying dogmatic judgment, places before the reader the evidence to be considered. Unfortunately, as he makes abundantly clear, this is insufficient for more than a verdict of 'not proven'. Did Swedenborg in fact possess clairvoyant powers? We cannot tell, and Dr. Dingwall believes that confirmatory facts will never now come to light. He suggests, however, that Swedenborg, along with other