

lie for the most part beyond scientific inquiry. Science is not the only right-of-way towards truth.

We cannot leave this thought-compelling address without expressing our admiration of its fine style, as picturesque as it is pithy, as lucid as it is light-some. It must have been delightful to listen to, especially in a place where the *genius loci* has such a notably hard head. This is said "without prejudice".

An advocate cannot speak on two sides at once, but when a similar occasion arises, as it will, we hope Sir Arthur will take for his subject the pruning of prejudices; for we are sure that he could deal with that supplementary subject with the same convincing illumination that his present plea illustrates.

J. A. T.

### Short Reviews.

*Deserts and the Birth of Civilizations.* By A. J. McNerny. Pp. 46. (Paris: Herbert Clarke, 1931.)

MR. MCINERNY attacks an old problem at a new angle. Like others before him, he would see the influence of the desert in the origin and growth of civilisation. He differs from them in making it solely responsible. In fact, the motto of his essay is "No desert, no civilisation"; and he goes so far as to suggest that any attempt to cultivate desert lands by irrigation at the present day would be a mistake and a possible danger. While it is beyond question that the formation of the great Saharan Desert was crucial in the early history of mankind, few archæologists would be prepared to follow the author in attributing the whole subsequent development of civilisation to the action of the desert areas. In Mr. McNerny's view, they have acted as laboratories for the purification of the air and the release of ozone, thus creating an atmosphere propitious to the development of intelligence and the bleaching of the skin—in short, producing the white man.

Mr. McNerny points to the fact that, with certain exceptions, the great civilisations of the past lie to the north of a series of desert belts, and argues from this that it is not to migrations or to temperature that we are to look for the cause of advance in culture, but in the flow of purified air from the desert zones towards the north. The similar flow towards the south, to the negro or dark belt, could only mitigate, but not eradicate, the more unfavourable conditions of the damp atmosphere, laden with organic impurities, of the tropical forested area. Mr. McNerny is not very successful in explaining away the exceptions in the civilisation of the Yangtse valley and that of Central and South America, where the deserts lie to the north; and if migration is eliminated, the air currents of western Europe seem to be a difficulty. In fact, the author tries to prove too much. Had he endeavoured to show that the character of

the atmosphere was one of a number of factors in the problem, he would have had a better chance of carrying conviction.

*Hunger and Love.* By Lionel Britton. Pp. xi + 705. (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., 1931.) 7s. 6d. net.

LIONEL BRITTON first became known to the reading public as the author of "Brain, a Play of the Whole Earth", sponsored by Bernard Shaw, praised by Hannen Swaffer, and proclaimed a work of genius by St. John Ervine. His new novel has an introduction by Bertrand Russell. One therefore approaches it with high expectations. It is not customary to review novels in this column. After reading the book, the reviewer is not convinced that its contents justify any departure from the usual practice of NATURE. True, there are frequent, almost too frequent, references to protons and protoplasm. These in themselves are not sufficient to justify the claim that the author has written the novel of the machine age. It is a long soliloquy, in which the hazy outline of Arthur Phelps occasionally obtrudes to remind the reader that it is intended to rank as fiction rather than philosophy.

It took Lionel Britton eight years to write the book: the reviewer took six months to read it. Only the prospect of having to write a short notice of its contents sustained him to the end. Britton says a good many penetrating things about contemporary civilisation. The reviewer shares many of his prejudices and most of his opinions, when they are not susceptible of proof. Unfortunately, his way of stating them is prosy, prolix, and disorderly. People who like *Ulysses* may like "Hunger and Love". Scientific workers, who generally attach importance to intellectual tidiness and coherent expression, will be inevitably repelled. Of the few who start it, still fewer will finish its seven hundred and five closely printed pages. It has captured the temper of contemporary biological realism far less successfully than Charlotte Haldane's "Brother to Bert" or the earlier novels of Mr. Wells.

*An Introduction to Human Experimental Physiology.* By Dr. F. W. Lamb. Pp. xii + 335. (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1930.) 12s. 6d.

THERE can be no question that the best study of man is upon man himself, but the arrangement of organised experiments for class work on this principle presents many difficulties. Dr. Lamb, as the result of ten years' trial, has succeeded in compiling a workable course of about fifteen lessons on each of the three systems—blood, respiration, and circulation.

Not only will this scheme of investigation of normal man serve as a most desirable preparation of medical students for work in the wards, but also the selection and presentation of the experiments prescribed will satisfy the demands of scientific education. In schools where the classical physiology occupies the preliminary years, this book might well form the basis of a course in clinical physiology during the period given to the study of medicine.