

In conclusion, we should mention that, although these dictionaries are published by the Government of the Dominion of India, we have, for convenience, used the term India in its old connotation, since in general their contents will appeal equally to the two Dominions, India and Pakistan.

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## 126 A CAREFUL STUDENT OF HISTORY

### The Meaning of Human History

By Morris R. Cohen. (Paul Carus Lectures, Sixth Series, 1944.) Pp. ix+304. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1947.) 4 dollars.

"It is not well to give an affirmative answer without examining the meaning of the question and making some necessary distinctions." Such prudence in dealing with vague concepts of the meaning of human history, with the numerous alleged 'laws' and explanations of the growth of human society, was very much in the character of the late Morris Cohen's writing. Lucid, careful in distinguishing, ready to postpone acceptance of a solution of a problem if it had no more to commend itself than that it solved part of the problem, these were the intellectual merits manifested in all his writing; and they are manifested in these posthumously published Carus Lectures.

Morris Cohen was not totally unimpressed by the claims of some of these systems of historical prediction or explanation. "Various theodicies, systems of evolution, and physical, political, economic, or other interpretations of history have all tried to make the endlessly complicated web of history conform to a pattern based on some happy guess." Morris Cohen did not deny importance to happy guesses; what he did deny was that a guess was more than a guess or that any of these systems answered all the questions which an intelligent observer of human society is forced to put to himself. Biological and physical conditions are of great importance, but they cannot explain all that puzzles us in the growth of human society. Religious beliefs, economic organisation, even that much despised category 'great men', all play their part. But they do not play the whole part. Few writers were less affected by mere fashion, or by the prestige or the lack of it attaching to any particular doctrine.

Morris Cohen was not easily impressed, and among the great names that in this connexion fail to impress him greatly, or at all, are Hume, Bacon, Marx, Freud, Karl Pearson, Croce. Nor are doctrines more reverently handled. Crude forms of determinism which, if examined, turn out not to be deterministic; what passes for the history of science (a theme he returns to again and again); simple-minded views of progress; all are examined and their weaknesses made plain. But his disregard for fashion works the other way, too, in the defence of the social contract theory, in the almost lyrical praise of the scientific pioneers of the University of Padua, in the affirmation of ethical claims with which the lectures end. No reader of these lectures will end them without having been forced to think a little more clearly on the question of historical causation, on the necessary conditions of certain types of intellectual progress, on social institutions like the city.

It is human to note that Morris Cohen did not always observe his own rigorous canons of historical proof. It is difficult to see how (on his principles) we can even guess that "there is probably less happiness in Europe to-day than in the eighteenth century, or even in the nineteenth". Nor is the statement that "Germans have changed their character in historic times, e.g. since Kant" invulnerable to the kind of criticism Cohen directed against rash generalizations based on the selection of arbitrary examples and too confident use of correlations. The population of Prussia, when it was still almost entirely agricultural, cannot have been as dense as is stated on p. 183. It would (if these figures are right) have been as densely populated as modern Belgium or modern Saxony. If square miles are replaced by square leagues, it is intelligible. Then, Chamisso and La Motte Fouqué do not make the point against naive race doctrines of nationality nearly as well as do other Germans of French origin, Savigny, von Verdy du Vernois, von Arnaud de la Perière, or Du Bois Reymond. It is the printers, presumably, who mis-spell Schrödinger and Lecky. Morris Cohen gave no comfort to the enthusiasts who thought and think that the growth of human society can be studied in the manner, and with the presumption of results, that we are accustomed to in the physical sciences. But he was convinced that it could be studied with profit, to the enlargement of our social imagination, to the understanding of our problems and to the reinforcement of our belief that there is ethical progress and that its chief enemy is not brute force but "negligence in the pursuit of the right".

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## PRACTICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE ASTRONOMY

### Practical Astronomy

By Prof. Jacob John Nassau. (McGraw-Hill Astronomical Series, Second edition. Pp. xii+311. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1948.) 30s.

### New Handbook of the Heavens

By Hubert J. Bernhard, Dorothy A. Bennett and Hugh S. Rice. (Whittlesey House Publication.) Revised edition. Pp. xi+360. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1948.) 18s.

### Astronomy

By William T. Skilling and Robert S. Richardson. Revised edition. Pp. xi+692. (New York: Henry Holt and Co.; London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1948.) 28s. net.

### Worlds Without End

By Sir H. Spencer Jones. Revised edition. Pp. xv+262+32 plates. (London: English Universities Press, Ltd., 1948.) 10s. 6d. net.

PROF. J. J. NASSAU'S book is intended for students in civil engineering who have had no other course in astronomy, and for other students who wish to do some observational work to supplement the theoretical side of their study. This second edition incorporates revisions and additions, which have resulted in a fifty per cent increase as compared with the first, published in 1931. Part 1 deals with fundamental principles and ordinary determinations of time, latitude and longitude, as well as with the