

Carnegie Institution of Washington

Publication 589: *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing; Introduction*. By J. Eric S. Thompson. Pp. xvii+347+64 plates. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1950.) 7 dollars.

THIS work is a very profound study of a very difficult subject, which appeals primarily to specialists. Nevertheless, it is written with such a background of knowledge of the Maya, both those who survive and those long dead, that no student of American archaeology can afford to neglect it. Eric Thompson has studied the Maya for nearly twenty-five years and has long been known as one of the foremost authorities on their hieroglyphic writing. This book will consolidate and increase his reputation.

The book contains a wealth of detailed information about the various types of Maya inscription, those cut on stone, and those painted in the manuscripts and to a lesser extent on wall or pot. Each of the great synchronized cycles which make up the calendar is considered, and much new light is also thrown on divinatory inscriptions. All this reveals the extraordinary complexity of the subject, but the treatment is lightened by the author's constant insistence on human and spiritual factors and by the happiness of his style. He says, in effect, that mathematics and astronomy have an essential part in this study, but that an understanding of Maya religion and mythology is more important; and he goes so far as to state that "Mysticism, religion and poetry completely dominate their hieroglyphic writing". It is emphasized that the whole of Maya religion revolves around the majestic conception of the eternal march of time, in which the periods into which the calendar is divided are borne along by the gods, who pause only to change over like relay runners at the appropriate period endings. This is graphically shown on the most elaborate form of inscription, the full-figure glyphs exemplified by Stela D. at Copan, of which a free modern version forms the frontispiece.

The study of Maya glyphs has few adherents in Great Britain, so this review has been deliberately kept short; but its brevity is no measure of the importance of the work, which, in its own field, can scarcely be exaggerated. G. H. S. BUSHNELL

A History of Philosophical Systems

Edited by Prof. Vergilius Ferm. Pp. xv+642. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950.) 6 dollars.

IN this work forty-seven short articles by forty-one different authors on special philosophical subjects, for example, platonism, the philosophy of the enlightenment and existentialism, have been well printed, placed between boards and decorated with Rodin's "Penseur" on the dust cover. All the same, it has not made a good book, and it is scarcely history. As articles in an encyclopædia, along with other related articles and cross-references, they would have their use. For the period up to the end of the eighteenth century the ground is fairly well covered, except for political theory. For more recent times the subjects are selected on no recognizable system; there is repetition and there are gaps. Some articles are rather perfunctory, with inadequate bibliographies; others are careful, scholarly summaries of their subjects, with well-selected bibliographies.

The article on "Semantics", by Prof. Gustav Bergmann, is a well-directed attack on fashionable theories about language, showing that even if they

have some limited technical validity, they are of no philosophical interest. I would willingly give half the price of the book for this article, because it accords with my prejudices, and perhaps less willingly the other half for three of the others. Most students of philosophy and most librarians, on their behalf, will do well to spend their six dollars on something else. A. D. RITCHE

New Biology, 10

Edited by M. L. Johnson and Michael Abercrombie. Pp. 144+31 plates. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1951.) 1s. 6d.

THE latest of the "Famous Animals" to be described in "New Biology" is *Amoeba*. The description appears in the tenth issue, and in it Michael Swann has collected up-to-date information about the nature of the plasmalemma, the mechanics of pseudopodial movement and the genetic constitution of amoeba; the article is a worthy successor to previous ones which dealt with *Hydra* and the tapeworm. Another valuable article in this issue of "New Biology" is one by John Carthy on instinct, which surveys the contemporary field with particular reference to the work of Tinbergen and Lorenz on "releasers". Other topics considered are the biological application of isotopes, apple scars and blemishes, and mimicry in the British fauna. An account is also given of observations made by Richard Perry on the gannet during his stay on the small island of Noss in the Shetlands in 1946 as well as of some recent inquiries by G. E. Fogg into the wetting of leaves by water, a subject of increasing agricultural importance now that more and more liquid sprays are being developed. In addition to some useful diagrams, this issue of "New Biology" contains thirty-one supplementary photographs as well as an index and a list of contents of all previous issues. Once more "New Biology" may be commended as a credit to editors and publishers alike.

Catalogue of Lewis's Medical, Scientific and Technical Lending Library

New edition, revised to December 31, 1949. Pp. xii+1152. (London: H. K. Lewis and Co., Ltd., 1950.) 35s. net; to Library subscribers, 17s. 6d. net.

LEWIS'S Lending Library was established in 1848 mainly to supply the needs of the medical profession but also to lend out books of scientific or philosophical interest not to be found in the ordinary circulating libraries. Later, to meet the requirements of those engaged in the research departments of industrial organizations, the scope of the library was considerably extended to include a wide range of technical subjects; the value of this service is reflected in the large number and variety of industrial organizations which use the library to-day. An important feature of the library is that each book in it is the latest revised edition; when a new edition appears all library copies of the previous edition are withdrawn. The catalogue of the library is classified under the three headings of authors and titles, an index of subjects with the names of authors who have written upon them and an alphabetical list of subjects; the arrangement is such that reference is made both interesting and easy. At present the catalogue contains about 27,000 titles, the total number of volumes in circulation in the library being more than 90,000. For the service the library offers the subscription rates are remarkably low.