Book Reviews

ECONOMIC REASONING

A Theory of Economic History

By J. Hicks. Pp. vii+181. (Clarendon Press: Oxford; Oxford University Press: London, October 1969.) 25s boards; 10s paper.

UNLIKE the work of his peers, Nicholas Kaldor and Joan Robinson, Sir John Hicks's work has been marked less by sheer originality than by elegance. From wage theory to growth theory, from the theory of demand to public finance, Hicks has produced work which is less a breakthrough than a consolidation of earlier insights. This is a traditional style: Mill and Marshall—and, until the *General Theory*, Keynes—sought to establish their claims to orthodoxy rather than originality, to intellectual power rather than dash.

Yet, unexpectedly, the doyen of English academic economists has produced a book of originality and power which may prove to be not only his greatest contribution to scholarship but the book which establishes his rightful place in intellectual life. Distinguished economists—Marshall, Keynes, Dobb—have often made excursions into economic history, to illuminate their theories. Some economic historians, like Cunningham, Clapham and Hobsbawm, have sought to use theory to explain their history. Marx has been of course the exemplar of the marriage of economic theory and history. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is some of Marx's intellectual strength and adventure in Hicks's latest book, though, if this slightly absurd comparison were to be drawn, it could be said that what it lacks is implicit in its essay-form, the deep grasp of detail.

The problem is a simple one. What is the economic process, historically? According to Hicks, man did not start in primitive simplicity, but in societies dominated by custom, and subject to command by a king or an army chieftain.

From this simple but well-argued point, he goes on to the development of taxation and of a bureaucracy to ensure the payment of taxation. Public finance, therefore, takes precedence over trade. "Their central economic nexus is revenue", he writes of early societies. The market grows up alongside the religious festivals or other gatherings, first with general traders who increasingly specialize. The mercantile economy develops within the protective embrace of the command and customary economies, but it becomes itself a source of conflict between different societies. Hicks sees the city state as the peculiarity which divides Asian history from European history; and it is the relation of the merchants to the cities that he sees to be crucial, because the merchants can help to evolve legal forms that are especially suitable to their own form of trading, and so allow all-round advantages to grow from wider trade.

Beyond this, the development of money, law and credit evolved from city states which coalesced into a semi-mercantilized state. In his discussion of money, Hicks achieves his first act of sheer intellectual brilliance—he uses contemporary monetary theory with a power that illuminates the origins of money in a way that earlier attempts (notably D. H. Robertson's by no means negligible contribution in *Money*) did not.

The fact that he does so in simple non-technical language, and largely omits what he thinks to be incorrect (without refuting it), may mask his achievement. Similarly with his exposition of modern capital theory (pages 148–154), which is a miracle of compression.

This book, like Joan Robinson's *Economic Philosophy*, has much to give the specialist. It also has much to give the non-specialist who wishes to gain an insight into economic reasoning.

JOHN VAIZEY

RISE OF THE SPINNING MACHINE

The Textile Industry

An Account of the Early Inventions of Spinning, Weaving and Knitting Machines. By W. English. (Industrial Archaeology, Vol. 4.) Pp. xiv+242+32 plates. (Longmans: London, December 1969.) 55s.

THIS book is one of a series on industrial archaeology prepared under the general editorship of Mr L. T. C. Rolt. It is an account of some of the early developments in spinning, weaving and knitting machines and is a useful addition to the already considerable literature on the subject. The author has successfully presented a great deal of detailed technical information in a readable way and has linked this with interesting observations on the inventors of the early machines and on the times in which they lived.

The fascinating story of invention for the textile industry is told clearly and is well illustrated, so that those who are not familiar with textile machines can readily appreciate the significance of each new development. An extremely wide range of topics is considered. There are, for example, chapters on hand spinning wheels, early carding machines, the spinning machines of Arkwright and of Paul, Hargreaves's spinning jenny, Roberts's automatic mule, Kay's fly shuttle, Cartwright's loom, Lee's stocking frame, and developments in pattern weaving. There are also essays on the rise of the woollen and worsted industries and of the flax industries, and the book includes two chapters on the factory system. In other chapters, more recent progress in spinning, weaving and knitting machines is briefly considered.

On reading the book it is impossible not to be impressed by the great tradition of the textile industry. Men of widely different backgrounds contributed to its development. Kay, Hargreaves, Arkwright and Crompton had practical knowledge of the industry and were highly skilled engineers. Dr Edmund Cartwright, however, one of the outstanding inventors, knew nothing about textile processing when he became interested in the problem of weaving. He was educated at New College, Oxford, and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1806. At the age of 41 when he was rector of Goadby Marwood, he happened to discuss with some Manchester businessmen the possibility of constructing a loom which could be driven by water or steam power. The general opinion of manufacturers of the day was that the construction of such a loom was almost impossible. Although he knew nothing about the subject, "having never at the time seen a person weave", Cartwright decided to disprove the argument. In this he was successful and in due course he patented satisfactory machines.

In an industry which has so successfully exploited human ingenuity, it is inconceivable that it should now become stagnant and unprogressive. The contemporary textile industry is still a fruitful field for the inventor, who is now generally a sophisticated engineer or an applied scientist, and as the author of this book says in his concluding paragraph, "the future of the textile industry appears as a vision of more new raw materials, of spinning without spindles, weaving without shuttles and knitting without needles".

Mr English has presented his material well. It is well