

BOOK REVIEWS

An Attitude Explored

The Cambridge Mind: Ninety Years of the Cambridge Review, 1879-1969. Edited by Eric Homberger, William Janeway and Simon Schama. Pp. 315 + 18 photographs. (Jonathan Cape: London, 1970.) 80s.

It would be surprising if an anthology of articles from the *Cambridge Review* collected to mark its ninetieth anniversary did not contain some interesting material; and it would be interesting to see whether the *Oxford Magazine*, now alas defunct, could provide as wide a range of what are, chiefly, book reviews and obituaries. The latter might help one to decide the more difficult question suggested by the title; is there in fact a "Cambridge Mind"? The editors suggest some of its possible characteristics: "a rigour of logical analysis; an uncompromising exercise of sceptical inquiry; a commitment to verification rather than imaginative construction" (p. 16). But one would think that these would be essential components of the mental world of any great university, not just of Cambridge. The editors go on to say that "the same severity of standard is applied to the function of language in poetry as it is to the explanation of genetic information or to the study of seventeenth century society". The difficulty there is to find a reviewer competent to decide on the basis of this volume whether this is true or not. If these were the characteristics of Cambridge history, Professor Godfrey Elton, in the course of an illuminating piece on Maitland, tells us that this is no longer generally true; and T. S. Eliot, writing in 1928, perhaps not with Cambridge especially in mind, was lamenting the arrival of the age of the amateur and of the fact that there was by then "very little respect for authority; by which I mean respect for the man who has special knowledge of some subject of which oneself is ignorant" (p. 227).

Because I do not have the capacity to judge the section dealing with the natural sciences, I am prepared to take the editors' word for it; and in any event the glories of the Cavendish and other Cambridge centres of scientific excellence hardly need emphasizing. But when one looks at the "social sciences", the editors' claim becomes

harder to maintain. There are some good destructive pieces in what one hopes is the true Cambridge vein: Michael Oakeshott on "Dialectical Materialism" and John Dunn on Hannah Arendt. But were the editors really kind, in relation to all that has happened and is happening in Soviet Russia and Western Europe, to reprint a piece by Professor Joan Robinson, dated 1937, in which she argued that under socialism the entire process of production and distribution could be carried out without the intervention of a pricing system except where, everything else having been provided, it was just a question of "choosing between one kind of luxury and another". How much of a commitment to "verification rather than imaginative construction" went into that? And one would think that the late Bertrand Russell to whom the volume is dedicated might have been more worthily represented by his philosophical or mathematical work than by his amateur dabblings in international politics.

The editors claim no particular virtues for Cambridge as a nursery of stylists; yet as one reads through a volume like this, one cannot help but be impressed by the variations in the capacity for expressing thought both over the years and as between the different disciplines. The best written piece is the first, a letter from India written by Archdeacon Cunningham in 1882; though Mr F. L. Lucas's obituary of Julian Bell, published in 1937, has a fine passage of satire at the expense of Franco and his friends. The scientists wrote effectively, and the historians also. On the other hand, the great reputation of the Cambridge English school would not seem to be based on any capacity of its members (Mr Lucas alone excepted) to say clearly what it is they have in mind.

Perhaps a Cambridge quality that explains this defect is the quality of other-wordliness which can so easily degenerate into an insular snobbery. It is clear that Lord Snow felt this when in reviewing H. G. Wells's splendid autobiography he wrote: "It is probably fair to say that various bodies of 'Cambridge' opinion have shown more unanimity in disapproving of Wells's work than in anything else whatever" (p. 281).

It would be hard to pick up this volume without finding something one was pleased to read; but if there is to be a study of the Cambridge mind, it will have to be based on the asking of questions, not on the talents of three anthologizers.

MAX BELOFF

Educational Frontiers

A Strategy for Education. By Herman T. Epstein. Pp. vii + 122. (Oxford University: London, December 1970.) 35s.

It would be a shame to shrug off this little book with a disdainful smile, though in some ways it asks for it. Under the pretentious title we find a recipe for teaching science to non-specialists. The outrage to accepted practice is obvious, the evaluation incomplete. Not much attention is paid to what others have done or written on teaching science—not even to something so very close to the author's principal theme as Michael Yudkin's *General Education* (Allen Lane, 1969). And yet there is food for thought here: a constructive proposal to meet an urgent need from an enthusiastic pioneer.

Epstein's approach, the "research studies method", was developed initially for teaching biology to non-science students at Brandeis University. Each teacher chooses, from his own research field, six to ten original papers that make up a single "story line". Classes consist of a series of seminars on these. It is claimed for the method that it reverses the "flight from teaching" of research scientists; apart from selecting the set of papers, they are supposed to require little preparation time, for the material is already very familiar to them. Background explanations are given in digressions of not more than ten minutes. Use of textbooks, reviews and *Scientific American* articles is discouraged during the first two thirds of the semester long course, because they shut off discussion; classes are conducted through student questioning of the teacher. "The students should be helped to learn to rely on their instructors for answers to questions" (p. 37). Despite this, Epstein claims that learning is "experience-based". It all depends,