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Book Reviews

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Lorenzo in Taos. Mabel Dodge Luhan. Alfred A. Knopf. 1932. $3.50.

"Heaven knows what it is to be honest in writing. One has to write from some point of view, and leave all other aspects, from all the remaining points of view, to be conjectured." So says D. H. Lawrence in a letter to Mabel Luhan, written from Genoa, in January, 1926. And the point of view of *Lorenzo in Taos,* by Mabel Dodge Luhan, is definitely that which has been strained through Mabel Luhan herself. In following the various episodes of Lawrence from the time Mabel Luhan decides that he must go up to Taos and experience the rhythms of a primitive people and of a primitive land, the reader is definitely conscious of him solely from those emotional reactions which Mrs. Luhan wishes to pass on. The effect is somewhat akin to that of viewing a kaleidoscope of four figures—Mabel Luhan, D. H. Lawrence, Frieda Lawrence, and Tony Luhan—figures that shift and change, becoming at times almost grotesque and unreal, and fusing finally into a portrait of Mrs. Luhan herself.

She has chosen to present her material in the form of revelations, supposedly written to Robinson Jeffers, the California poet, in which she tells him of her "willing" Lawrence and Frieda to go to Taos. She narrates clearly their hesitancy in going, their final arrival, their experiences there, and their leaving. She includes her letters to Lawrence and Lawrence's letters to her from November, 1921, to January, 1930. This is presented against the background formed by the "Big House," which offers a material haven for those artistic ones having no physical sustenance, yet desiring expression.

In a foreword, Mrs. Luhan states to Jeffers: "This book tries to show you how we felt and acted some years ago." Undoubtedly she tells how they acted. But the feelings. There the reader is forced to wonder if the feelings were not

recorded from that point of view which Mrs. Luhan wants to give. She tells of her desire for Lawrence, of her constant attempts to make him realize that for her, he was the one man who could release her into creative action. She shows how he vivifies her life. Such are the facts given to the reader. With the reading of these facts, there begins to dawn wonderment. She admires him, she seeks him, but she pictures him at various times as shivering and giggling, and with that, the illusion snaps.

Mrs. Luhan stresses at times her fundamental need of Tony—Tony, the Taos Indian who is now her husband. According to her, he typifies that fundamental rhythm which rises from an ancient civilization and a primitive land.

For the devotees of D. H. Lawrence, *Lorenzo in Taos* will possibly offer a deeper understanding of the man; for the casual reader, it will offer an amusing narration of artistic life in Taos.

ELSIE RUTH DYKES CHANT.

The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics. By Dr. Max Planck, Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Berlin. Translated by W. H. Johnston, B.A. Published by W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., New York, 1931.

During the period from 1905 to 1915 of Einstein's development of his Theory of Relativity the Quantum Theory of Max Planck lay in an uneasy sleep. It is the theory which pictures light energy as corpuscular. Relativity makes space-time a stationary unbroken continuum. It is hard to reconcile such a theory with that of Planck. There is, however, no mutual contradiction of the two theories. While developing his Relativity, Einstein has made important contributions to Planck's Quantum Theory. The newest of all the theories of physical science is Wave Mechanics in which an attempt is made to unify Relativity and the Quantum Theory.

The little thing called a Quantum of Action, for the invention of which Max Planck is responsible, is a bee in the bonnet of physical science. It is an atom more fundamental than the electron. No "physical conception" of it is possible. We picture the electron as a material particle. More fundamental than matter is "action"—the product of energy and time. We think we can picture *"a particle of matter at a given instant."* Yet surely a particle of matter needs time in which to have its being and a *particle-second* is more "real" than a particle. Matter and energy being—as Relativity regards them—of one common nature, we then see that more fundamental than an atom of matter is an atom of "energy times time," that is to say an atom of "action."

Planck is one of the greatest scientists of the present age and his views of the universe in the light of modern physics are of interest to all men. In the book under review he is concerned to make clear his objection to being called a "determinist."

The conflict between determinism and indeterminism has found its way into physical science through the refusal of the electron to behave lawfully. Within the atom which is its home, the electron's behavior has baffled all prediction. It acts like a creature with "free-will."

Planck says (p. 51) "Today, indeed, there are eminent physicists who under the compulsion of facts are inclined to sacrifice the principle of strict causality in the physical view of the world." . . .

"So far as I can see, however, there is no ground for such a reunuciation. For there always remains the possibility that the reason why it is impossible to give a definite answer resides, not in the nature of the theory, but in the manner in which the question is asked."

Much of this book is too technical to be understood or even found interesting by the reader who has not studied modern physical theories, but it is so planned that consid-

erable omissions may be made without loss of the book's thread. On pages 90 to 93 the question of free-will is dealt with very specifically. The argument and its wording are so simple and so carefully thought out, that any attempt at a brief interpretation is apt to become misleading. Extensive quotation is thus warranted.

"The existence of strict causality implies that the actions, the mental processes, and especially the will of every individual are completely determined at any given moment by the state of his mind, taken as a whole, in the previous moment, and by any influences acting upon him coming from the external world. We have no reason whatever for doubting the truth of this assertion. But the question of free-will is not concerned with the question whether there is such a definite connection, but whether the person in question is aware of this connection. This, and this alone, determines whether a person can or cannot feel free. If a man were able to forecast his own future solely on the ground of causality, then and then only we would have to deny this consciousness of freedom of the will. Such a contingency is, however, impossible since it contains a logical contradiction. Complete knowledge implies that the object apprehended is not altered by any events taking place in the knowing subject; and if subject and object are identical this assumption does not apply. To put it more concretely, the knowledge of any motive or of any activity of will is an inner experience, from which a fresh motive may spring; consequently such an awareness increases the number of possible motives. But as soon as this is recognized, the recognition brings about a fresh act of awareness, which in its turn can generate yet another activity of the will. In this way the chain proceeds, without it ever being possible to reach a motive which is definitely decisive for any future action; in other words to reach an awareness which is not in its turn the occasion of a fresh act of will. When we look back upon a finished action, which we can contemplate as a

whole, the case is completely different. Here knowledge no longer influences will, and hence a strictly causal consideration of motives and will is possible, at least in theory.

"If these considerations appear unintelligible—if it is thought that a mind could completely grasp the causes of its present state, provided it were intelligent enough—then such an argument is akin to saying a giant who is big enough to look down on everybody else should be able to look down on himself as well. The fact is that no person, however clever, can derive the decisive motives of his own conscious actions from the causal law alone; he requires another law—the ethical law, for which the highest intelligence and the most subtle self-analysis are no adequate substitute."

Clear and definite though this argument is, we doubt whether many will accept patiently the suggestion that the notion of will-freedom is a self-delusion: a delusion which we never should entertain if our knowledge were more complete. After all, our ultimate criterion of truth is our own feeling. Absolute truth is a matter of taste. To most men the feeling of will-freedom is so real that there is no room for discussion of its reality. If will-freedom be unreal then nothing in life is real. This does not mean that we possess any such powers as "freedom of choice," or "creative ability." The will-freedom of which we are sure—about which no discussion can arise—is the thing which distinguishes life events from physical events, namely, it is the freedom of our thoughts and actions from the tyranny of the law—a law never departed from in the events of the world of physical science—that what has happened before is likely to happen again.

Planck has failed to mention explicitly this aspect of will-freedom, but leaves room for it in the last sentence of our quotation, "he requires another law—the ethical law. . ."

F. M. DENTON.

Science and First Principles. By F. S. C. Northrop, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Yale University. Published by MacMillan in 1931, Price $3.

The publisher's "blurb" about this book attracts the scientifically minded reader with the compelling force that a good menu has on a hungry epicure. Its extracts from reviews are carefully chosen. Their hasty perusal leaves the impression that the book is hailed with praise not only by authorities in the fields of philosophy and of literature but also by renowned men of science.

Having read the book, my feelings were so mixed and so uneasy that I turned again to the fascinating "blurb." Taken as a whole, the blurb is equivocal, and I find it not inconsistent with the view that in spite of its many good points the book has no permanent value as a contribution to scientific thought.

It is written with aggressive confidence. Its author roams widely over many of the fields of science and shows interest in them all, but in none of them has he the knowledge of an expert or the modest love of an amateur.

Einstein's Relativity provides Professor Northrop with pitfalls. For instance, on page 65 he writes, "Since the square of c (186000 miles per second) is a velocity . . ." This may be a mere slip but had the author been as familiar with elementary mechanics as he surely is with household shopping he could no more have called c squared a velocity than he could have asked for a yard of milk.

The book is written with such care and skill that the impression is left of deep understanding. For instance, pages 76 to 83, on the General Theory of Relativity contain so much that is either sound or plausible that on a first reading its author's apparent failure to grasp the distinction between the special and the general theories is obscured. On page 80 we read, "A given geometry or chronogeometry, whether it be Euclidean or Riemannian, like a gravitational field, can be brought into or put out of exist-

ence by a suitable choice of reference body." This is a mixture of nonsense and misconception. How can a geometry be like a gravitational field? What sense would there be, for instance, in saying "Euclidean geometry is like empty space"? And how can a geometry be brought into or put out of existence by a suitable choice of reference body? Does the author mean that the need of using any particular geometry in describing physical events may be removed in favor of some other geometry by an alternative choice of reference frame? That, though misleading might be intelligible, but the suggestion seems to be that there is nothing absolute about a gravitational field. Such a suggestion is wrong except in the special case never met with in nature in which the field is homaloidal. It is the absoluteness of nature's gravitational fields that demanded the general theory.

On page 127, "But this tensor only describes a motion of infinitely short extent." This statement seems to show complete unfamiliarity with the fact that Einstein's equations deal with elements (ds) of space-time interval, not with distance or motion.

There is no need to pick out many specific examples of the use of words which, though they look scientific have no scientific meaning. Such examples abound. Here is one, (page 85), "For mathematics indicates that the tensor, the values of the variables of which will define a relative space-time and remain invariant in form for all possible transformations, or in other words for any shift of reference frame, is determined completely by the number of dimensions of the metric which appears in a given frame." What are the variables referred to? If they are the potentials then it is untrue to say that they or their forms are invariant. Invariance belongs not to the potentials but to the gradients of the gradients of the potentials.

The discussion on pages 158 to 164, of probability and the second law of thermodynamics is entertaining, but the

logic is false by which the conclusion is reached that the second law "must be true half of the time and false the other half." The point seems to have been missed that at the moment when by chance some given degree of organization has been reached, there are more ways in which, by further shuffling, this organization may be decreased, than ways in which it may be increased.

The book covers, in an interesting conversational manner, a wide range of scientific fields. Its object appears to be the disclosure of a big idea—that of the "cosmic atom"—which shall illuminate science and provide the clue to the solution of all its difficulties. I have found insuperable difficulty in trying to make sense of this part of the book, or to find illumination or inspiration in it. One or two quotations may make comment unnecessary. On page 216, we are introduced to the "cosmic atom." "An analysis of certain strategic conceptions in relativity and atomic physics and general physiology has forced us to the discovery of a new theory of the first principles of science. Nature is constituted not merely of the electrons of traditional physical theory, but also of one large spherical physical macroscopic atom which surrounds and congests them. The congestion arises solely from the fact that the diameter of the macroscopic atom is finite in length and so short relatively to the very large finite numbers *(sic)* of microscopic atoms which it contains, that they are crowded together to form an equilibrium."

Page 273: "The physical character of the macroscopic atom has additional significance for theology. It means that God has a body. Otherwise it would be devoid of the power to change the direction of motion of the microscopic particles. This makes it evident that God is not omnipotent. For the microscopic particles possess energy also." Page 274: "In fact, were God without a physical body, he would not exist."

Page 275: "Now, that which distinguishes the macroscopic atom from other simple and complex substances is its perfect spherical form. Since the formal is what we mean by the rational, it follows that the distinguishing attribute of God is rationality. Moreover, since the spherical form of the macroscopic atom is perfect, and this perfect form constitutes the content of its consciousness, it follows that this atom is the most perfectly and unequivocally clear-headed of all real objects."

Page 275: "God is not, as Aristotle supposed, a musty museum of eternal forms. Instead, the divine is the one embodied perfect atomic form, the sphere, which because of its relation of inclusion to the many recitilinear forms of microscopic atomic motion, generates, in the logical sense of that term, the complex forms of the world of imagination and observation."

F. M. DENTON.

Solitude

By FRANCES E. ANDREWS

Oh, pity that man who holds no joy nor peace
In solitude upon a quiet hill
Remote from all where he may find release
From sham or cares that bind against his will—
Or on the stoop in front of his abode,
Alone, a man may meditate and find
The answer to his questions, and his load
Of doubts will cease to rack his tired mind;
The vastness of all nature and its power
Will minimize the ends men seek to gain,
The years that nature holds against the hour
Of man will show which greatness will remain;
For nature shares its wisdom only when
Man deems it greater than the brains of men.