

VI.—NEW BOOKS

The Metaphysical Society, 1869-1880. By ALAN WILLARD BROWN. Columbia University Press (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege) 1947. Pp. xviii + 372.

THIS is an extremely interesting book, by an American author, about an English society of which many of us have vaguely heard but about the details of which most of us are, I suspect, very ignorant.

The Metaphysical Society arose from a suggestion of Mr. (afterwards Sir James) Knowles, of whom more anon. Tennyson and Charles Pritchard (formerly headmaster of the school which Knowles had attended at Clapham and afterwards Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford and a pioneer in stellar photography) met at Knowles's house in Clapham in November, 1868, and it was agreed to try to found a *theological* society on a wide basis. Knowles thereupon sounded Dean Stanley, Dean Alford, Cardinal Manning, Dr. Martineau, W. G. Ward, and R. H. Hutton, the editor of the *Spectator*, who all agreed to join. Stanley and his wife, *née* Lady Augusta Bruce, thought that the original plan was too narrow and that non-Christians and non-theists should be included. This amendment was accepted, and the society was called the '*Metaphysical Society*'. Attempts were made to get Mill and Herbert Spencer and Newman to join, but these were unsuccessful. Apart from these three and Carlyle, Browning, Bain, Arnold, and G. H. Lewes, almost all the most eminent mid-Victorian thinkers became members. There was a considerable overlap between the Society and the Cambridge *Apostles*; more than one-sixth of the original members of the former had been '*Apostles*' or had been influenced by '*Apostles*'.

After a preliminary meeting at Willis's Rooms on April 21st, 1869, at which W. B. Carpenter, James Hinton, Hutton, Huxley, Knowles, Lubbock, Martineau, Roden Noel, Pritchard, Seeley, Stanley, Tennyson and Ward were present, the Society settled down to its work. The first regular meeting was held at Stanley's deanery of Westminster on June 2nd, 1869. Tennyson was not present; but the meeting was inaugurated by Knowles reading to the Society Tennyson's poem, *The Higher Pantheism*, which the poet had written and submitted for the occasion. Thereafter Hutton read the first paper, which was a criticism on Spencer's theory of the transformation of utilitarianism into intuitive morality, afterwards published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for July, 1869.

The society used to hold a meeting, usually preceded by a dinner at the Grosvenor Hotel, on the second Wednesday of each month except August, September, and October. Each paper was printed and circulated before the meeting at which it was to be read. The average attendance at the earlier meetings was 15. The society lasted until November 16th, 1880, when it was dissolved by agreement and the surplus funds were made over to 'the publishers of MIND for the use of the proprietors'. The meeting held for this purpose was in Martineau's house. The last paper was read on May 11th, 1880, by C. B. Upton, a pupil of Martineau's and Professor of Philosophy in Manchester College, Oxford. It was entitled *The recent Phase of the Free-Will Controversy*.

Professor Brown says that almost all the 96 or 97 papers read treated some aspect of the theme: 'What *must* a man believe? What *can* a man

believe ' about God and the external world and himself. He distinguishes three successive periods in the society's activities, viz., 1869-73, 1873-78, and 1878-80. The first period ends with a paper by Manning entitled *A Diagnosis and a Prescription* (June 10th, 1873). Manning complained of lack of agreed terminology, lack of a common method, and the fact that the papers did not each state a definite proposition and then attack or defend it. He recommended a reversion to the terminology and methods of the Scholastics. Manning's prescription was not accepted, but the society seems to have agreed so far with his diagnosis as to appoint a *Committee on Definitions* early in the autumn of 1874. This reported on March 12th, 1878, but the report was never printed.

Just before the report of the Committee was issued Mark Pattison read a paper on *Double Truth* (February 12th, 1878), which Professor Brown takes as marking the end of the second period. The third period begins with a paper by Matthew Boulton with the ominous title: *Has the Metaphysical Society any raison d'être?* (April 9th, 1878). Boulton argued that it had, but the facts seem to have been against him. Huxley said that the society died 'of too much love'. But during the latter period, when the vehement Fitzjames Stephen was a prominent figure, the urbanity with which which members holding opposite views had agreed to differ became somewhat strained. Some of the members who were elected in the third period, e.g., John Morley, Leslie Stephen, and Sir Frederic Pollock, had no very high opinion of the discussions. They belonged to a new generation, and found that topics were treated in a way that seemed to them amateurish. It seems likely that by the third period the members had really come down to differences which were fundamental, and that further discussion between them had become unprofitable.

Professor Brown sub-divides the 62 men who were members of the society during the ten years of its life into certain categories, which he admits overlap to some extent, and discusses them and their contributions under these headings. The divisions which he chooses are *Theists and Churchmen* (Chap. VI), *Rationalists and Scientists* (Chap. VII), *Critics and Philosophers* (Chap. VIII). The society included three Anglican bishops (Ellicott of Gloucester, Magee of Peterborough, and William Thomson of York); four distinguished Roman Catholics (Manning, Ward, Dalgairns, and Gasquet); besides Maurice, Martineau, and Stanley. Under the head of 'rationalists' are included James Hinton (father of the author of a famous popular book on the fourth dimension); Frederic Harrison, the English 'Positivist pope'; Mark Pattison; W. R. Greg; W. K. Clifford; John Morley; and Fitzjames and Leslie Stephen. Rather oddly, as it seems to me, Sidgwick is included here and not under 'philosophers'. The chief of the 'scientists' are Huxley, who was twice chairman, Tyndall, Lubbock, Carpenter and Pritchard. Croom Robertson, the founder and first editor of *MIND*, is also counted here and not among philosophers. Among 'critics and philosophers' the most important are Ruskin, Bagehot and J. A. Froude, under the first heading, and Shadworth Hodgson, Pollock, Campbell Frazer, A. J. Balfour, and Sully, under the second.

During the lifetime of the society and for some fifteen years after its death there was in England a most remarkable collection of serious periodicals which exercised an important influence on educated opinion. There was a very close connexion between the society and these periodicals. Knowles, the founder of the *Metaphysical Society*, was editor of the *Contemporary Review* at the time; and during the period which elapsed between the foundation of the society and his retirement from the editor-

ship, no less than 156 of the articles were contributed by 'Metaphysicians'. These were contributed by thirty-six members, and the indefatigable Mr. Gladstone was the author of seventeen. Early in 1877 Knowles resigned his editorship, owing to differences with Strahan the publisher, and founded the *Nineteenth Century*, which he continued to own and edit with extraordinary success for many years. Of the eleven contributors to the first number (March 1877) no less than eight were 'Metaphysicians'; and in the four years which elapsed from the foundation of the *Nineteenth Century* to the death of the society more than 25 per cent. of the articles were contributed by twenty-six members. Mr. Gladstone again heads the list with twenty-three of these papers.

Professor Brown's judgment on this matter is summed up as follows: 'The *Contemporary* best reflects the impact of the Metaphysical Society on the intellectual history of the 70's; but it is the *Nineteenth Century* which translates the spirit and method of the Society into a popular journalism which would continue to affect the thought and attitudes of England long after the Society had ceased. For both James Knowles was in the largest measure responsible.'

It is evident that Knowles was a most remarkable man, highly intelligent himself and with a gift for bringing out the best that was in greater men than he. He was the son of an architect, and successfully followed his father's profession from 1853 to 1870, when he became editor of the *Contemporary*. He designed Tennyson's house *Aldworth* in Surrey, and became an intimate personal friend of Tennyson's. He was secretary of the society from its foundation until November 1879, when he was succeeded by Pollock.

Among the members of the society who were editors of important periodicals may be mentioned Hutton (*Spectator*), Ward (*Dublin Review*), Bagehot (*Economist*), J. A. Froude (*Frazer's*), Leslie Stephen (*Cornhill*), and Morley (*Fortnightly*).

As the Metaphysical Society neared its end several members of it founded or took part in founding other societies of a more specialised and technical character, some of which are still flourishing. Among these Professor Brown mentions the *Society for Psychological Research*, the *Aristotelian Society*, the *Mind Association*, and the *Synthetic Society*. The most important 'Metaphysician' among the original members of the *S.P.R.* was Sidgwick. Professor Brown mentions Shadworth Hodgson, Hutton, and Roden Noel as others. He has omitted to notice that Tennyson and Ruskin also were *honorary* members of the *S.P.R.* from the beginning. He attaches, it seems to me, an altogether exaggerated weight to Sir A. Conan Doyle (not of course a 'Metaphysician'), whom he describes as 'an important member' and whose ridiculous letter of resignation in 1930 he quotes at some length. He mentions the *Journal* (a small brochure intended for private circulation to members only) and seems not to have heard of the *Proceedings*, in which all the most important work of members of the *S.P.R.* is issued to the general public. He concludes by saying: 'The more authority the *S.P.R.* acquired the more sceptical it became in all truly spiritualistic matters'. I do not know exactly what meaning Professor Brown attaches to the phrase 'truly spiritualistic matters'. If it covers human survival of bodily death, I should doubt whether Professor Brown's statement is correct as regards some of the most important and active members. It is certainly not true, e.g., of Mrs. Sidgwick or of Gerald Balfour.

It is needless to dilate to readers of *MIND* on the *Aristotelian Society*, founded and nurtured by the 'Metaphysician' Shadworth Hodgson. Still

less is it necessary to describe the foundation of *MIND* by Croom Robertson, its first editor. Professor Brown quotes extensively from the preliminary notice, which makes interesting reading.

I think that the following quotation from Chap. XIII of Professor Brown's book gives a very fair summary of the spirit and achievements of the Metaphysical Society. '... the members of the Metaphysical Society... felt no narrow nationalism and manifested few insular prejudices. The most amazing aspect of their discussions is how entirely absent are the qualities of softness, sentimentality, easy moralising on English virtues, and hypocritical idealism, so often and so wrongly attributed to the Victorians by a generation of earlier critics... The great spirits, with few exceptions, were far more free of these than modern politicians, journalists, or social reformers. And the Metaphysical Society can be called representative of the great spirits.'

I would add that the book contains four appendices; one giving a list of members; one concerned with the minute book; one with a list of the papers read; and one with an account of the dissolution of the Society. There is also a valuable bibliography.

I have noticed one misprint and one mistake of fact. The misprint on p. 117, l. 20 is the very common error of miscalling the Knightbridge Professorship in Cambridge by the name of Knightsbridge, a district in London. The mistake of fact on p. 164, l. 7, is that A. J. Balfour is said to have been *grandson* (instead of nephew) of the Lord Salisbury to whom he was secretary at the beginning of his Parliamentary career.

In conclusion I will quote a story about James Hinton, one of the 'Metaphysicians', which was recently told me by a colleague who is connected with his family. At his time British workmen were addicted to getting drunk and beating their wives, and appeared to derive great satisfaction from this exercise. Hinton was an experimentalist of an unconventional kind, and he decided (after asking and obtaining the consent of Mrs. Hinton) that he would substitute knowledge by acquaintance for knowledge by description in this department of human activity. He therefore sat down, determined to make himself drunk; and his wife sat beside him ready to be beaten. When he recovered normal consciousness he found that he had merely gone to sleep and that Mrs. Hinton was still patiently awaiting her chastisement. I understand that the experiment was never repeated.

C. D. BROAD.

Knowledge and the Good in Plato's Republic. By H. W. B. JOSEPH. Oxford University Press. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1948. Pp. viii, 76. 5s.

THE Editor, Mr. H. L. A. Hart, tells us that this essay (which is about 26,000 words) was written in September, 1925; and that he has here published it as the author wrote it, except for a few minor verbal alterations, and for dividing it into chapters and giving titles to the chapters and to the whole. (It contains, however, a reference to Burnet's *Platonism*, which was published in 1928.)

The essay is a discussion of the central passage of Plato's *Republic* on the 'idea of the good'. After a survey of the place of this passage in the scheme of the dialogue, and some remarks on Plato's refusal to 'identify the good' with pleasure or with knowledge, Joseph passes to a discussion of the simile of the Sun. He points out that Plato 'does not here at any rate substitute for the contrast between *νοητά* and *ὄρατά* one between *νοητά* and