

CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES

Crisis in the Humanities is a disappointing book, the publishers of which cannot be acquitted from a charge of bookmaking. Of the 170 pages, over two thirds are unconnected with the title. The essays on sociology and economics are by far the best in the book, but they are not related to the main topic, if there is a main topic. Both are imbued with a spirit of supreme self-confidence; sociology has become a major element in our culture; economics will be led on to greatness. Both are claimed to be sciences in as much as they are based either on a specialised use of language, or on mathematics. It is true that Mr. Sargent ingeniously relates his essay to the title of the collection, by insisting that the gap between the economists and the layman, can be narrowed only if mathematics is restored to the humanities. If we are to use humanities as another term for a general education, then there should have been essays on physics and chemistry. Dr. Vidler's essay deals with the possibility of introducing theology into general education and is more concerned with the mechanism than with the educational significance of such a study. The most remarkable example of departing on a tangent is Quentin Bell on the fine arts. This has almost nothing to say on its alleged subject, but is concerned with the Diploma in Art and Design and the place of art history in such a diploma. It is very largely administrative, and in any case is relevant to a discussion of technical education and not of general education. We are left then with four essays which might be expected to interest the reader who purchased this book from the publisher's list. "Crisis in the Classics" by M. E. Finley, "The Historian's Dilemma" by J. H. Plumb, "Crisis in the Humanities and the Mainstream of Philosophy" by EruRsf Gellner and "Crisis in Literary Education" by Graham Hough. Not a very great deal for one's 5/6d., particularly when the reader realises half way through Mr. Hough's essay, that he has read it all before in the Listener at a proportionately much smaller cost. The selection of authors cannot be considered representative—in particular Mr. Ernest GeUner would

not be considered by most philosophers as to be in the mainstream of philosophy—and it would be better to have enlarged the book with different approaches, rather than padding it out with irrelevances.

To those of us who were brought up on Victorian children's fiction, or even on the works of Miss Ivy Compton-Bumett, the word "crisis" will always suggest to us that dramatic moment when the body has set before it the alternatives of life and death and makes its irrevocable choice. Penicillin has changed all that, we are told, and it may well be that in the curious post-mortem existence which western civilization has enjoyed since 1914 any concept of crisis is outdated. In that case, why not just drop the word instead of debasing it, to mean almost nothing. A more satisfactory title for this work would have been "Doubts and Difficulties in the Teaching of the Humanities". The difficulties are not the same in all subjects. Students of Latin and Greek have certainly declined proportionately and perhaps absolutely. Students of English and history have increased enormously and continue, every year, to increase. Modern foreign languages apparently do not come within the scope of the Humanities as far as the editor of this book is concerned, nor does music. Judged by external prosperity the humanities are flourishing as never before. According to reports in The Times Educational Supplement, the arts faculties of British universities are crowded out, whilst there is plenty of room for the scientists. Prestige also

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