

## REVIEWS

THE MALTHUSIAN POPULATION THEORY. By Dr G. F. McCleary. (Faber and Faber; 15s.)

Dr McCleary, who has written interesting and valuable books and pamphlets on the subject of population for many years, has now decided to write this short book; but with some indecision, apparently, as to which of two things it was intended to be—a scholarly and precise account of Malthus's life and historical background, or a discussion of his theories in the light of up-to-date information. For there can hardly be room for both objectives within a book of such short compass.

In the former field this reviewer is not competent to criticise; but it appears *prima facie* that Dr McCleary has done an excellent task. He is not, of course, addressing himself to those who study the detailed minutiae of history but—may one use the phrase?—to the 'Faber and Faber' public, which appears to include a body of well-informed people who have provided a market for some admirable books and pamphlets in the past. The author gives us a precise but readable biography of Malthus and a clear account of his friends and background, and a summary of the important points which he made in his writings; still more, a clear statement of what Malthus did *not* advocate.

Even after the lapse of a hundred and fifty years, however, one cannot get away from personalities. Malthus's personality obviously aroused violent controversy in his own lifetime. Two of Malthus's best-known critics were Hazlitt, a liberal essayist whose writings have certainly stood the test of time, well-known both for his attacks on the utilitarian Bentham and on the *Conservative Edinburgh Review*; and Cobbett, whose *Rural Rides* will be read as long as the English language is spoken. Dr McCleary, in defending Malthus, attacks Hazlitt and ignores Cobbett. But there may have been some reason for this intense antipathy which Malthus aroused among his contemporaries. Was he not guilty of that narrow pedantry and priggishness which are sometimes the product of a Cambridge mathematical education? (All right, all right, Oxford may have had worse faults, 'steeped in port and prejudice'; but at any rate they are rather more amiable faults.)

It is clear now, at any rate, that Malthus's famous arithmetical and geometrical progressions were an unjustified piece of pedantry, even for a Cambridge mathematician. It is rather a serious omission that Dr McCleary tells us nothing about Malthus's religious views, which appear to have been of an extraordinary nature.

Dr McCleary devotes some fifty of his pages to discussing, 'Was Malthus right about population?' To answer this question sincerely it is necessary

to make some sort of review of all the facts which have become available since Malthus wrote. Certainly a difficult task to accomplish in fifty pages. But Dr McCleary has hardly even begun it. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how anyone could have written two chapters so deficient in their statement of the important facts and tendencies. It is not made clear to the reader that some of Malthus's ideas were put into practice from the early nineteenth century by France, and from the later nineteenth century by other European and North American communities. Dr McCleary gives a very brief account of the reasoning of French demographers on the subject of 'social capillarity'—the restriction of families for the purpose of 'social climbing'—but does not discuss the extent or importance of this phenomenon. Nor are we given one word in indication that during the last two decades there has been, in all western and North American communities *except* England and some of the Scandinavian countries, a violent reversal of trend and a great increase in the size of the family. Is 'climbing' as a large-scale social phenomenon coming to an end in the more secure and equalitarian economies of the present day? Nor, on the other hand, are we told anything of the marked slowing down in the rate of population growth in Japan, in spite of declining mortality; and the very significant deceleration of the rate of population growth in India since 1941. We are given some quotations from Dr Kingsley Davies's book on Indian population, a massive but very defective work which leaves out all the most interesting modern information, and which was apparently written entirely in New York.

The book gives some account of Malthus's teaching in the field of economic theory, which really constitutes quite another subject, of considerable interest to modern economists. In Malthus's controversy with Ricardo, the details of which have only recently become known, Malthus appears to have been right.

But both Malthus and Ricardo agree in thinking that all economic activity was carried on subject to 'the Law of Diminishing Returns'. One of the most important conclusions of modern economic theory is that while the Law of Diminishing Returns applies in most forms of agriculture, on the other hand manufacture, transport and similar activities follow a Law of Increasing Returns. The larger and more densely settled a population is, the greater economies will be enjoyed in these fields. This is a fact that invalidates a great part of Malthus's argument, of which Dr McCleary does not give us the slightest indication.

That a population should go on increasing indefinitely in a geometrical progression is a theoretical possibility, and Malthus's fault was that he, like many men of similar mind, was dazzled by theoretical possibilities. It is certainly not a historical fact. No population of which we have record has ever gone on increasing at a steady rate for very long. And to say

that every check to population growth so far observed has been due to a shortage of cultivable land is a complete distortion of the facts. Nearly all the checks to population growth which have been observed in history and in the modern world have been in countries with abundant reserves of uncultivated land or with industrial resources enabling them to obtain by exchange all the food they want. The reason for cessation or slowing down of population growth has rarely, if ever, had anything to do with a shortage of cultivable land.

Finally, as for the statement that food supplies can only increase in arithmetical progression, this is based on no evidence whatsoever. Malthus needed it to complete his mathematical syllogism and invented it for the purpose. This is a subject on which a good deal of information has become available since Malthus wrote and is another of the subjects on which Dr McCleary fails to inform his readers. On the same land and without any additional labour, agricultural output increases steadily in a geometrical progression. In most European countries this has been at the rate of about one per cent per annum, but it has often been higher. Denmark and Japan, for instance, have shown a figure of two per cent per annum, and most of the modern progressive agricultural countries now have a figure of nearly three per cent per annum. This figure, it should be noticed, is higher than any rate of population growth ever recorded.

What is in question is not the world's *capacity* to produce sufficient food: it is our *will* to do so.

COLIN CLARK

MOZART IN SALZBURG. By Max Kenyon. (Putnam; 2 is.)

The first four hundred numbers in Köchel's catalogue refer to works written before Mozart had settled in Vienna at the age of twenty-five. This enormous list contains little of the music through which he is known and loved today, except some of the early piano sonatas, which are more often execrated by the youthful than loved by the elderly. Though precociously imitative, Mozart was not so early-flowering a genius as Schubert, Mendelssohn or William Walton, and very few of these works composed while he dwelt in Salzburg can be called 'of genius'; the few exceptions all belong to the close of that period. It is good to find this opinion confirmed by Mr Kenyon. As a child-prodigy Wolfgang was no different from the two Wesleys or the little Crotch. When one recalls editions of his earliest trifles headed 'Mozart der Wunderknabe', one is grateful to read the sane statement: 'Among prodigies he was merely a prodigy; it is among men that he is unique'.

This is not to deny that much in his Salzburg works foreshadows greater things, nor that, if he had died before 1781, we should not have recognised that great unwritten music had been lost. Indeed, movements full of lyrical charm or buoyant spirits abound in the symphonies, con-