

MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY. By Jose Ortega y Gasset; translated with an Introduction by Howard Lee Nostrand. (International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction: Kegan Paul; 7s. 6d.)

This remarkable little book grew out of a lecture given by the author to the students of Madrid University in 1930. It grew quickly, being published, as a footnote tells us, soon after the lecture and not long after *The Revolt of the Masses*. It is rather odd that an English translation has not appeared before; Sr Ortega's exertions on behalf of the Republic in the early 1930's might well have drawn that tribute from the Anglo-Saxon Left. Perhaps his leaving Spain and the political arena (driven by extreme ill-health in 1936) had something to do with this. Anyhow, the present translation was worth waiting for; I cannot judge its fidelity to the Spanish, but it is excellent English.

The translator is not, perhaps, so happy in his rather prolonged Introduction. He is informative about Dilthey's influence upon Ortega (Ortega himself says that he owes to Germany 'four-fifths of his intellectual possessions') and on the Spanish professor's methods as teacher and thinker.

Ortega says that he 'loathes' lecturing, but his clear, colloquial style with its rapid and pithy conciseness must have been most engaging. He is informal, yet very precise. His method is to throw aside irrelevances, working down to a single central point. You see his thought in the making. He is brisk and humorous, but also extremely acute. His asides are not mere 'asides', but either principles underlying the argument or comparisons which really illustrate it: Thus, 'it is our privilege to *try* to be whatever we wish; but it is vicious to pretend to be what we are not', whence it follows, 'instead of teaching what *ought* to be taught . . . we must teach only what *can* be taught; that is, *what can be learned*'. Again, a digression on economics backs up the same idea of 'economy in education'; 'Scarcity is the basis of economic activity. . . . Scarcity of the capacity to learn is the cardinal principle of education. It is necessary to provide for teaching precisely in proportion as the learner is unable to learn' (i.e. by himself). And how shrewd is this: 'The symptom that something is a residue . . . is that we do not perceive why it is within us'; and this: 'Reform is the creation of new usages. Abuses are always of minor importance. For either they are abuses in the most natural sense of the word, namely isolated, infrequent cases of departure from usage; or else they are so frequent and customary, so persistent and so generally tolerated, that they are no longer to be called abuses'.

Ortega is out for a radical reform of the whole University 'usage', not in Spain only but everywhere. His positive thesis turns upon two distinctions. First, scientific research and discovery (the *via inventionis* as St Thomas would say) are sharply distinguished from science as a body of knowledge actually possessed and transmitted by teacher

to pupil (the *via disciplina*). The former is properly the concern of a tiny minority; the latter is everyone's business—to be meted out however with the 'economy' already referred to. Both aspects of science are then distinguished from 'culture', but diversely: the former is more remote, it supplies the materials, so to say, of culture; the latter is an integral part of it. But together they still fall short of culture, for the knowledge they connote is always in the particular, whereas culture is essentially general because it is a training and aptitude for life as a whole. As Ortega characteristically puts it: "General culture". The absurdity of the term, its Philistinism, betrays its insincerity. "Culture", referring to the human mind . . . cannot be anything else but general. There is no being "cultured" in physics or mathematics. That would simply mean to be *learned* in a particular subject'. And culture, he fiercely insists, is no 'ornament' but a strict functional necessity if *human* life is to go on. What then is it? For Ortega it means a certain minimum knowledge (1) of the physical, biological and historical world, and (2) of 'the plan of the universe', of 'how speculative philosophy conceives today its perpetual essay to formulate a plan of the Universe'. The stress on modernity is respectable in the sense that it is reasoned out from a philosophical principle.

Yet it is here, if anywhere, that one senses a vagueness behind the surface logic. For Ortega philosophy is not, apparently, a strict science grounded on reason. He would not, I fancy, uphold a realist noetic, at least not in the metaphysical order. He prefers to speak of philosophy as the possession of those ideas concerning reality which are 'vital' at any given instant. This is to live 'at the height of the times', to be 'cultured'. Very well; but are there really any permanent, 'eternal' truths which transcend time, even if we can only discover and transmit them in time? And if there are such truths how in fact do we take hold of them? It is obvious that Sr Ortega has seen certain truths clearly; it is only doubtful whether his explanation of this fact would be philosophically valid. The question is relevant to his standing as a defender of human culture; even if, without putting this question, we can still delight in the racy vigour of his defence.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

**GUTTERSNIPE.** By Sam Shaw, with a foreword by Sir Bertrand Watson, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate. (Sampson Low; 12s. 6d.)

That 'one half of the world does not know how the other half lives' is so true—and so unfortunate in its consequences—that one should welcome any book which helps to bridge any of the gulfs that yawn between man and man.

This story starts in a Birmingham slum and ends in a Sheffield A.R.P. Wardens' Post, traversing much strange ground in between—including an Industrial School, the farms and coal-mines of Wales, and a sanatorium (the sequel to the mines).

From this material the author writes a most interesting auto-