

THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM, by C. A. R. Crosland. *Jonathan Cape, 15s.*

The post-war authors who have fundamentally affected thought in the social sciences are very few. If we except Dr John Bowlby's work on maternal deprivation as falling outside our range, we are left with Professor Galbraith in America and Mr C. A. R. Crosland here as alone qualifying beyond dispute. The appearance of an abridged and revised edition of *The Future of Socialism* imposes the task of re-reading a book which appeared originally in 1956 and has since become an established classic. Mr John Strachey, who before the war himself exerted more influence than any other left-wing writer, is quoted by the publishers as paying a generous and well justified tribute to the first edition. 'It is,' he wrote, 'a major work and no one must in future take part in the current controversy on socialism without having read it'. Those words still seem to me true and likely to remain so for a long time to come.

Mr Crosland is a stylist. If I say that he writes as well as Professor Ayer, I shall, I hope, convey the point that in each case a brilliant pen was available to assist a remarkable, analytic talent. He is also a first rate economist. How many other members of the House of Commons have taught economic theory since the war? When he passes from political economy, in the broad sense, he becomes surprisingly naive. He suddenly reveals himself as a vehement opponent of our divorce laws and what he calls 'our pre-historic and flagrantly unfair abortion laws'. Yet a moment later he quotes Keynes with approval as urging us 'to return to some of the sure and most certain principles of religion and traditional virtue'. He ends with this moving pronouncement, 'We do not want to enter the age of abundance only to find that we have lost the values which might teach us how to enjoy it'. There is no

evidence that by 1956 Mr Crosland had done any thinking on moral issues of a quality remotely comparable with his magnificent pioneering work on the political and economic aspects of socialism. Let us hope that with his extraordinary talents and passionate search for truth he will one day put that right.

One can be quite sure that with an epoch-making book of this kind one will misrepresent the argument if one summarizes it. Yet the task is unavoidable if only because the influence actually exerted in such a case is inevitably narrowed down to one of two simple propositions which everyone thinks that they remember. Most people who follow the development of socialism at all are aware that Mr Crosland, to quote the publishers again, 'was the leading revisionist spokesman in the internal Labour Party dispute which followed the 1959 election'. To be a revisionist in this sense is to be the opposite of a revolutionary, i.e. one revises doctrine in a so-called right-wing direction.

No one is, however, so much alive as Mr Crosland himself to the possible indictment of deserting socialist first principles, and in six masterly pages he summarizes the twelve socialist doctrines which he considers have been most influential, among them the labour theory of value, Christian socialism, Marxism, Fabianism, the welfare state and the doctrine of planning. He concludes that the outstanding characteristics are variety and heterogeneity. 'It is this which makes it impossible to isolate any one orthodoxy to be consulted now about the future.'

Yet he remains desperately anxious to prove that he is still in a meaningful sense a true socialist, that he has not poured away the baby with the bath water. He convinces me at least that in any foreseeable future he could work

happily with the vast majority of socialists and, indeed, play a conspicuous part in guiding them. 'I feel clear,' he says, 'that we need large egalitarian changes in our education system, the distribution of property, the distribution of resources in periods of need, social manners and style of life and a location of power within industry; and perhaps some, but certainly a smaller, change in respect of income from work. I think that these changes taken together will amount to a considerable social revolution'.

So they would. It is true that he informs us immediately afterwards that a definite limit exists to the degree of equality which is desirable. But he leaves that issue to be settled by a later generation.

If a demand for far more equality than we have ever seen before is the badge of a respectable socialist, Mr Crosland is entitled to wear it for as far ahead as we can see. His revisionism cannot be disposed of, and has not in fact been disposed of, by fair minded socialists on the grounds that socialism is about equality and he is not a genuine equalitarian. What then is his immensely significant contribution? In what sense and what direction has he shifted thought? Basically he has challenged all that part of socialist theory which assumes that social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is essential alike to economic efficiency and social justice. Certainly when the present reviewer joined the Labour Party in 1946 no one would have dreamed of openly challenging that part of the doctrine. Mr Crosland may have been assisted by the movement of events since that time but it needed exceptional courage and intellectual initiative to work out a socialist theory in which additional public ownership hardly figured at all.

No one who had not studied and reflected profoundly on economic developments in recent

years in many countries could have worked out so confidently and coherently the future processes by which an economy still containing large elements of private enterprise could at the same time expand the national income and distribute it much more fairly. Without final dogma but with underlying conviction he suggests we can indeed run a mixed economy at a high level of employment and a healthy rate of growth but without a progressive enrichment of the shareholder at the expense of the rest of the community. Admittedly, the ideal is unlikely to be achieved without heavy taxation of some kind or another. And here Mr Crosland praying in aid some foreign experience, is prepared for the act of faith. What he has, of course, disposed of is not only the economic argument that without nationalization equality cannot be achieved, he has further rejected the deep-rooted socialist conviction that profits are wrong in the moral sense, that they represent an evil motive in the profit-seeker and an evil relationship between the bourgeoisie and the working class. This principle, or prejudice, call it what you will, dies hard within the Labour Party, although little is heard of it in contemporary political discussion. From a Christian point of view (and in 1956, at least Mr Crosland showed little familiarity with Christian thought), it would be hard to denounce all profit seeking as wrong and yet very easy to agree that the search for profits is a low inspiration compared with zeal for the public welfare.

Equality apart, on which there is no immediate difference between socialists of left and right, the way still seems open for a form of socialism which has not yet been worked out, but which draws on higher motives than those which have made the capitalist wheels go around.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that Mr Crosland would substantially alter one major

argument if he were writing today. With admirable candour, he confesses to having been too optimistic about the Anglo-Saxon economy in terms of growth. He mentions the economies in Western Europe and Scandinavia which have shown what could be done. The British general election of 1964 was largely centred on the question of which party would more effectively *plan* the growth of the economy. There is nothing clearly inconsistent here with what Mr Crosland wrote eight years ago. Certainly there

is nothing to make him revise his ideas on nationalization. It does seem at this precise moment as though there were a greater gulf between the two parties than he expected in their attitudes to planning. Nevertheless, his book as a whole, so long as it confines itself to economics and politics, possesses a timeless quality which should outlast many general elections.

*Longford*

THE WORLD OF THE SHINING PRINCE; Court Life in Ancient Japan by Ivan Morris; *Oxford University Press, 50s.*

Dr Morris's book describes with extraordinary skill a highly cultured but to us almost unimaginably remote and unfamiliar society. The 'World of the Shining Prince' is the world of the Emperor's Court in Kyoto a thousand years ago; to be precise, the world of Prince Genji, the hero of the immensely long novel written about the year A.D. 1000 by the court lady Murasaki Shikibu, which provides the chief source of our knowledge of this brilliant though ephemeral society.

*The Tale of Genji* was translated by Arthur Waley some thirty-five years ago with a grace and insight which made the translation a work of literature in its own right. As the work appeared, volume by volume, people were fascinated to discover a society where the characters were obviously human, swayed by human emotions, described with a penetrating insight extraordinary in so early a work, and yet the work of one who lives against a background of thought and custom utterly strange. Most of our doubts on these points were at the time of reading suspended in the general 'suspension of disbelief' in which the work involved us, but afterwards we found our-

selves speculating on the springs of this vanished society. What were the moral ideas which governed the peculiar relations between men and women? What accounted for the almost over-refined aesthetic sense which seemed so to dominate people's lives? What religious beliefs were to explain the incidents of demoniacal possession? How was it that at this period of Japanese history, when the preceding literature of fiction had scarcely risen above the folk-tale, a woman should produce a novel of such psychological insight that it is still accounted one of the major works of literature of the world?

Dr Morris's book sets out to answer these questions by giving us a coherent account of this civilization, its ideas, beliefs and customs. And so skilfully has he succeeded that at the end of the book we feel we have undergone the salutary experience of entering a strange world, recognizing it in all its strangeness, and yet understanding what made it a viable and comprehensible place to live in.

We can first visualize from Dr Morris's vivid account the appearance of the inhabitants. Their beauty was of an order strange to us. The men