

REVIEWS

THE IDEA OF HISTORY. By R. G. Collingwood. (Cumberlege, Oxford University Press; 20s.)

It is very fitting that the last book which will appear over the name of the late Professor Collingwood should be concerned with the philosophy of history. He was both philosopher and historian, and so on this subject might have claimed to speak with peculiar authority. So he does claim, in places: 'I am not arguing; I am telling him' (p. 263) and the tone is not absent elsewhere. But one is thus presented with the paradox that an answer from authority is given to a philosophical question about the nature of historical thought, whereas on Professor Collingwood's theory, authority has no place in history, where one might suppose that it much more properly belongs. For him, however, such an opinion brands the holder as a 'scissors-and-paste man', or at best as a 'pigeon-holer', a mere 'chronicler' barred by the logic of his suppositions from consistently judging according to the evidence, or using the *a priori* historical imagination with that perfect autonomy which is here held to be the right of the scientific historian.

'History is its own criterion; it does not depend for its validity on something outside itself, it is an autonomous form of thought with its own principles and its own methods. Its principles are the laws of the historical spirit and no others; and the historical spirit creates itself in the work of historical enquiry' (p. 140). Convinced of this, the author asks how history differs from the writing of fiction. The answer given is that the novelist, and even the historical novelist, is limited only by the internal coherence and meaningfulness of his imagined scene and characters; the historian is further limited by what happened in fact. In his account of that, he must not go beyond the evidence. What then is this evidence? If each historian is primarily a historian of the coming-to-be of his own present, as is asserted, and is moreover an *a priori* fashioner of that present and its genesis in each unique act of historicising, what is this evidence which distinguishes him from an artist and makes him in some sort a scientist, enabling him moreover to communicate with other historians?

The answer is at first not very illuminating. 'Everything is evidence which the historian can use as evidence. . . . The whole perceptible world, then, is potentially and in principle evidence to the historian. It becomes actual evidence in so far as he can use it' (pp. 246-7). It appears from further descriptions that evidence is in fact the knowledge which enables us to argue from effects to causes. For the historian the effects are to be the immediate data which constitute his present, a printed page, an archaeological site, a potsherd. About these the (modern and scientific) historian will ask: How did this come into being and become my present? Any know-

ledge which will enable him to answer that question is to that extent evidence.

The theory thus identifies the critical method with historical method in general, and one can accordingly see why such insistence is placed on the historian's present as the only genuine material and starting-point for historical enquiry. Something must be accepted before one can ask the question, 'Why did it happen?' No authority may be accepted. The material object present to the historian remains the only possible starting-point. That would seem to be a logical outcome of adopting the critical method as the sole one proper to history. It follows that no history of the past is possible, only of the present—and with this, if by 'past' is meant 'dead past' the author entirely agrees, but, he says, it can be re-enacted by the historian in his own thought and so in his present be known as past, which is to be living past. Only when so re-enacted is the past historically knowable. (Cf. especially the examination of Oakeshott, pp. 157-8.) The thoroughness with which the premises are developed is evident. The practicability of adopting them to write the history of a long bygone age seems doubtful. If, for instance, a historian is ever in the course of a human lifetime to infer the delivery of a speech of Pericles beginning from a printed copy of Thucydides's account of it, he must surely make use of a great deal of incompletely criticised authority to bridge the centuries that intervene. And if he can be allowed to do that on prudential—but as Professor Collingwood insists on non-historical—grounds, the autonomy of history is not so perfect as is claimed.

Too much praise cannot be accorded to the editor, Professor T. M. Knox, for his arrangement of the work from the author's papers. Three-quarters of the book is a history of the growth of the idea of history, in which one can see the author's own views taking shape with reference to past historians and philosophers. In the remaining quarter these views are developed on their own account.

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

MURAL PAINTING. By Hans Feibusch. (Black; 21s.)

This accomplished dissertation on the art and craft of mural painting is both timely and necessary. Timely because, as the author points out, the abundance of talent available today calls for sustained and purposeful employment; and necessary, because of the prevalent lack of collaboration between architects and painters. Mural painting, the author justly maintains, should be an integral part of the structural conception, and the baroque fusion of structure, painting, and sculpture is cited as the greatest historical manifestation of this ideal principle. It is in the light of this principle that he makes his review of the mural techniques of the past, which, although it suggests a view of cultural development that is at least questionable, is not thereby rendered invalid, since his judgments are con-