

## LYSENKO IS RIGHT

THE subject matter and style of this booklet\* are as direct as its title. The author has been converted to Michurinism and he tells us why in forthright fashion. That his was no overnight conversion is made clear at several places in the text where he refers to his own earlier opinions. Thus he now sees that to try to reconcile the two sides is to adopt "a position which in fact, though not necessarily in intention, supported Mendel-Morganism" (page 40). He now appreciates the error in trying "to understand their [*the Michurinists'*-*D.M.R.*] generalisations in terms of experiments arranged so that chromosome variation is the decisive factor" (page 56). Clearly this book is the outcome of hard study and intense discussion and it bears the stamp of these throughout.

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\*LYSENKO IS RIGHT. By James Fyfe.  
(*Lawrence & Wishart, 2s. 6d.*)

Fyfe does much more for English readers than to summarise the proceedings of the Soviet discussions or to expound the views of Michurin biologists. He fits this material into a general argument that is original both in presentation and in content. Seeing in the theory of the gene a sophisticated twentieth-century variety of the scholastic doctrine of essential substances, he recalls that history has witnessed the demolition of successive versions of this doctrine with each major advance in science. He shows that the scholastic doctrine is foreign to the correct handling of practical problems and from this angle introduces his readers to the opposing conceptions of practice and heredity in the Michurinist and Mendelian viewpoints.

There may be some criticism of this booklet among biologists because it does not discuss Michurin biology from the standpoint of experimental results. Yet such criticism would be unfair, since the author's aim is simply to lay bare the fundamental differences between the two conceptions, differences which give rise to experiments asking completely different kinds of questions about nature. Fyfe brings out these fundamental differences very ably indeed. He then goes on to show that the whole question can only be fully understood in relation to the new situation of biology under Socialism. Further that the hostility of Western critics can only be understood in relation to cold-war politics.

I am not certain that Fyfe's attempt to deal with the role of the chromosomes in heredity from a Michurinist standpoint is a success. Yet he is to be commended for making his own contribution on this point which does worry biologists. However, he might ask himself if this worry is not simply a reflection of the extent to which the chromosomes have become identified with heredity in the minds of biologists themselves. On the question of mutual aid within a species, he seems to have misread Lysenko, a fact which underlines how unfamiliar we are with the practical problems out of which the general problem of intraspecific relations has arisen.

These are small points to criticise in an essay that is so admirable within the limits set, for it must be remembered that it is directed to specialists and laymen alike, a formidable undertaking. The whole is enlivened by pithy comments which bring some of the great questions involved into bold relief. I particularly liked his complete answer (in parentheses) to Malthusians of all ages: "As if all people do for food is to sit with their mouths open waiting for it to drop in" (page 51). All in all, this booklet strikes a new note in current Socialist literature and its author emerges as a gifted pamphleteer.

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