

Mr. Nibb and the Oracle

By E. P. MIDDLETON.

"*Man—the Madman,*" by John Nibb, published by Elliot Stock, London, price 2s.

THIS is a stimulating, if a little over-weighted, contribution to the literature of social and political criticism, consisting of satirical observations on current British life, customs and shibboleths, presented in the form of "discussions" — largely one-sided—between the author and a character called Theodore. (Date of first publication is not given in our copy; it is, presumably, a reprint of a work dating from, possibly, between the two World Wars.)

Progress, evolution, scientists, critical standards, modern music, the craze for speed, noise, tobacco, the law, politics, democracy, conceptions of hygiene and present-day economics, all come under the lash of Theodore's sharp, if a little supercilious tongue, often with telling and healthy results. On the whole, the book is a welcome breath of fresh air and common sense blowing through the stuffy cloisters of the complacency which passes for thought and imagination in such large areas of the population; and, while some of the allusions "date" the work, it is still very largely of current times.

On the subject of economics, however, Theodore's strictures go a little haywire. He makes some sound points, such as "economic nationalism, like its political counterpart, is a dangerous element, founded upon vested interests plus unsound philosophy" and "happiness is

individual but economics are treated nationally" and "trading is an affair of individuals and there should be no more of an artificial barrier between the French dealer and his German customer than between a Devonian and a Yorkshireman." As the Common Market obviously post-dated his book, Mr. Nibb's views on this development are not known to us.

But, in discussing Henry George, for instance, he betrays his own incomplete grasp of economic principles. ("His economics are falsified by his philosophy," he says without enlarging on this simple assertion.) He is thus brought to the confused position in which he advocates a form of smallholding, or parcelling out of land—a futile method of attempting to eliminate the private monopoly of land-rent, which is the basic cause of poverty. Mr. Nibb seems to imagine, that the trouble is in the size of the area possessed.

It is a pity that an otherwise useful critique of modern society should be marred by such confusion on a subject so basic to the author's main purpose. John Nibb is also the author of *Personism — a Philosophy of Peace* (6s.) and a number of provocative pamphlets on the subject of Internationalism. "Nationalism", he says "is contrary to Christianity."



How Much Agriculture?

By PAUL KNIGHT.

HOW much agriculture should we have? How far are subsidies to be regarded as a social service, and how far do they induce the right sort of developments in farming? These are some of the questions with which Gavin McCrone deals in his book, *The Economics of Subsidising Agriculture*. (Gavin McCrone, Allen & Unwin, 25s.). They are the kind of questions which should have been asked, and answered, long ago. It was inevitable, in the face of the steady climb of agricultural subsidies (£351 million in 1961/2) that they should be asked sooner or later; now the imminent prospect of Britain's entering the E.E.C. has brought the whole matter sharply into focus.

It may be useful, and ground-clearing, to go first to the heart of the matter and ask the prime question: "Why is agriculture subsidised at all?" Apart from the vested interest of those on the receiving end, whose answer is inseparable from self-interest and therefore obvious, there are several reasons which will be offered by different sections of the community according to their political, social, economic or simply traditional attitudes. The last-

named group, for instance, is likely to say something like this: "British agriculture? Of course it must not be allowed to die. What would Britain be without its countryside? What would the countryside be without the farms? What would we do without British roast beef?" And so forth. In the political sphere, the consensus of opinion would be an unthinking assertion that agriculture must be preserved, the answer to our main question being different only according to the political party to which the answerer belonged.

The Labour Party's position is simply that agriculture is an industry which cannot be allowed to die because it employs a given number of workers. It must be kept going at all costs. "At all costs" means protection and subsidies. The Conservative Party's answer is a more complex one, containing elements of political, economic and traditional attitudes. "Agriculture is a vital part of British life; its social, as well as its economic aspects, are important. While it must be made more efficient by increased mechanisation and lowered costs, a fair return