

are convinced by Mr Trevor-Roper's recent essay on the forces at work in the earlier seventeenth century will demand some qualifications as to the facts. For the rest, political theory seems to exist *in vacuo*, even the particular writers he discusses being strangely isolated from all that had gone before. A book of this sort might reasonably be expected to open, rather than to close, with an account, if not of Hooker and Bacon, at least of the political assumptions of the immediately preceding years. A curious and significant omission is that of Cromwell, who, precisely because he was a successful soldier and politician, is especially worth studying as a thinker. But Dr Zagorin's interests are so exclusively academic that, because Cromwell never wrote a treatise formally *de re publica*, he is thought, apparently, to have had no political philosophy at all. Such an attitude detracts from the value of the book, and it is to be hoped that when its author comes to write up these notes into his later work, he will anchor his discussion of theories more firmly to the lives and times of the men who produced them.

T. G. I. HAMNETT

THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM, 1660-1815. By Max Beloff. (Hutchinson's University Library; 8s. 6d.)

This is just the kind of book that a volume in this series should be: compact, thorough, scholarly, vigorous, and (one must say it) thought-provoking. Mr Beloff packs a great deal into his one hundred and eighty pages, and only very occasionally does his normally lucid and pungent style show signs of strain. He does not pretend to give a political history of the period. He means what his title says, and his chief interest lies in the institutional organization of European states, primarily in the eighteenth century. This might be forbidding, had not the author given the dry bones intelligible life by constant reference to social and economic developments. By taking France as the author of absolutism in the seventeenth century, with Prussia as its leading exponent in the eighteenth, and considering the rest of Europe mainly in relation to these two states, the author gives his study unity without (such is his skill) upsetting its balance. Nor does he forget that Europe had leaped the Atlantic, for an able and highly relevant sketch of the American Revolution, whose European significance he emphasizes, is thrown in towards the end. In his final chapter (on the years 1789-1815) Mr Beloff is not afraid, even in this age of elaborately dispassionate historiography, to point a tactful moral. Absolutism, he reminds us, is not a monopoly of monarchical society. With a warning gesture in the direction of totalitarian democracy, he ushers in the succeeding age. It is a wise and intelligent little book, which well deserves its place in a very useful series.

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