

## Book Reviews

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**CHILDREN OF THE UNIVERSE.** The Tale of Our Existence. By Hoimar von Ditfurth. 301 pp. Atheneum. \$10.95.

In this age of global political conflicts, together with astronautic triumphs of technology, in which man faces the chasm of a Dr. Jekyll confronting a Mr. Hyde, it is appropriate to ponder over the cosmic mystery of life as an astronomer might see it. With rumors of war, cold tepid or hot stirring the masses, how revealing to consider with the author of Children of the Universe that only "One instant ago life crossed the threshold from dull sensation into genuine self-awareness . . . and with the 'Copernican crisis' human beings began to feel that they had been marooned on a tiny particle of dust drifting forlornly through a hostile universe." What is this majestic universe of myriads of stars? Where do we come from and where are we heading? What is life all about? Children of the Universe unfolds an organic picture of the universe, in the spirit of the poet's "Thou canst not stir a flower without troubling a star." Ditfurth displays our earth as a spaceship and is greatly concerned in the origin of life. Since mutation is the motor of evolution, he asks is it at random, purposeless? At the same time, he assumes without asking is there "psychism" in the background? Although Einstein is not once mentioned in this volume on the mysteries of the universe, Ditfurth means to ask with this philosophizing physicist if life is the result of a game of dice?

One confronts these solemn and burning problems as Ditfurth discusses fascinating facts of science and maintains that the roots of our existence extend deep into interplanetary and intergalactic space. A vast net of relationships, periodic reversals of magnetic polarity of our earth, that seem to cause the evolution of life to jump forward, indicate the mysterious organic unity of the entire cosmos. This volume abounds in a wealth of enigmatic wonders of creation. While it may impress the fast reader with agnostic inclination, there is an attempt at ensouling the apparent mechanism of the universe, suggesting that science is not yet completely divorced from theology. It points to a cosmic religion, liberated from earthly provincialism, and dares to extend its roots to the infinity of the universe with life so abundant and divergent that no imagination is able to visualize. At this time of political muddle, let us ponder over this type of text that is bound to raise our eyes to the heavens and ask "Is this universe really mindful of man?"

—KAREL HUJER

*You may not have time to read every new book that floods the market in Astronomy*