

[1958. Review of *Albert Schweitzer*, by Jacques Feschotte. *Christianity Today* 1 Sep.]

GENIUS AT WORK

Albert Schweitzer, by Jacques Feschotte (Beacon Press, 130 pp., \$2.50) is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Butler University.

This book consists of a short and intimate account of Schweitzer's life plus two articles by Schweitzer himself; first, "Childhood Recollections," and, second, "Ethics in the Evolution of Human Thought."

Feschotte's material gives a clear impression of a genius at hard work in music, theology, and medicine. Some of its pages are in the finest style of French literary portraiture. It is, however, somewhat marred by constant adulation, for Feschotte does not hesitate to identify Schweitzer as "the most famous of living men" (p. 12).

Schweitzer's own recollections refer, among other childhood experiences, to a statue in Colmar of a Negro, which early fixed African in his mind. His article on ethics makes veneration of life the basic principle of conduct. Killing is the one thing most to be avoided. One wonders whether Schweitzer uses disinfectants and insect spray in his hospital, for Feschotte says that he "steers an inoffensive insect out of harm's way" (p. 97).

While we can agree with his condemnation of bull fighting, even he realizes that some killing is unavoidable. A farmer cannot preserve all the animals in his flocks. To nurse a wounded bird back to health, one must kill insects or fish. Thus, says Schweitzer, we are forced into guilt. And if veneration of life applies to all living things, as he says it does, one would have to conclude that even a vegetarian is forced into guilt.

This absurd conclusion raises doubts as to the wisdom of Schweitzer's ethics. Remarkable man that he is, his principles are not beyond question.

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