BOOK REVIEWS

Shotgun coverage of human genome computing

Human Genome Computing, Second Edition

On science and scientists

I Wish I’d Made You Angry Earlier, Essays on Science, Scientists and Humanity

There are not many scientists who can write about science and humanity – and there are even fewer who can write in a manner that can be understood by scientists and by the general public. Max Perutz, however, can do both. In this book, he presents 28 articles. Most of them appeared in the last ten years in periodicals such as the New York Review of Books – that is, publications that are not read by many scientists. Most of the articles are book reviews, and most of these books are autobiographies or biographies of great scientists. In his reviews, Perutz is able to condense these biographies to find what is essential. He has often met the scientists in question, or people who knew them, and so he can add revealing anecdotes. For example, in his article on Heisenberg, he mentions that, in 1947, Heisenberg said to a German refugee whose family had been murdered by the Nazis, ‘The Nazis should have been left in power longer; then they would have become quite decent’. Perutz condenses the biographies of Fritz Haber and his wife, Clara Immerwahr, down to 14 pages. What lives and deaths! He describes the facts and leaves judgement to the reader. From Haber he moves to Lise Meitner, Leo Szilard, Werner Heisenberg, Andrei Sakharov, François Jacob and, finally, to a particular enemy alien, Max Perutz. This autobiographical piece is actually the only text that has not been published before. In it, he describes his internment in England as an enemy alien. Together with other interned persons, he was to be shipped on a transatlantic liner away from England. The ship was hit by a torpedo. He states that he ‘was always able to act with a certain coolness, that is to say reflecting before taking each