

The Making of the Western Mind

The Making of the Western Mind, by F. Melian Stawell and F. S. Marvin. With Twelve Illustrations. New York: George H. Doran Company. \$3.50.

WITH the purpose of this book clearly announced in the preface and steadily pursued through forty-three chapters of text it is difficult to understand the misleading title on any other ground than the intervention of the publisher, cannily resolved to capitalize the modish curiosity of the public on the subject of our "mind." It is therefore proper to warn the reader that this book possesses no kinship in either method, purpose, or content with Professor Robinson's best seller. The authors concern themselves simply with defining the leading historical elements of European culture from the Greeks to our own day and are convinced not only that each period made a contribution of unique value but that each nation of Europe has given something so inestimable that, could it be cancelled, the common treasure would suffer an irreparable loss.

Since the culture here understood is the unfolding of the human spirit as expressed in its works, the question arises whether that spirit's innumerable phases and flowering can be brought within the covers of a single volume. Plainly selection was necessary, a rigorous selection which, in the last analysis, would have to be shaped by a more or less definite Weltanschauung and conform to some acceptable metaphysical scale of values. Without sacrificing precious space to a theoretical discussion, the authors, or rather the author, for it is plainly Mr. Stawell who is responsible for the plan of the work as well as the bulk of its matter, sets up the two concepts of freedom and unity, between which, as poles, the whole world of European culture is represented as suspended. Pursuit first of the one and then of the other (but always of one to the exclusion of the other) marks the spiritual history of Europe until it is fairly clear that the merging of both in a harmonious synthesis is the substance of our present problems. Thus an international solution of the existing crisis, involving a reasonable freedom for the component parts of mankind within an inclusive world order, is indicated as the proper goal of our immediate effort, though by no means proclaimed in advance as an inevitable achievement.

So slight a frame to support a culture movement of three thousand years may invite criticism on the score of its extreme simplicity. But if we agree that a synthesis such as this is worth attempting, we are obliged to accept some norm of judgment by which the welter of circumstance may be reduced to order, with the result that the only issue which is really debatable relates to the effectiveness of the chosen norm.

The popular applause that was recently elicited by Mr. H. G. Wells's *History of the World* can be explained, in part at least, by his selective standard, which is manifestly "science," but the standard of the present book is infinitely finer, because, derived from the colored dreams and unsatisfied gropings of mankind, it is predicated on the faith that the central reality for the chronicler of civilization is not "science" but rather something more inclusive and intangible, something that is sufficiently indicated by the word "spirit." However, as spirit means little for

the man in the street, as, in fact, it has no reality for him at all compared with flivvers, airplanes, steamshovels and the other conveniences through which he apprehends science, the prediction may be safely ventured that the present sketch will make no such splash as that caused by the facile and entertaining production of the famous Mr. Wells.

Even for the few who will peruse this work its value will depend less on its hidden faith than on its definite, palpable wares. For the proof of the pudding still, and quite properly, is not in the recipe but in the eating. And it is exactly here, in the execution, that the book shines. To dispose of Hellenism, Hebraism, Early Christianity and similar monumental phases of the spirit on the basis of a brief chapter for each movement is either to risk the plunge from the sublime to the ridiculous or to move steadily at an extraordinarily high level of penetrating intelligence. And, on the whole, the level is maintained, and, what is particularly noteworthy, not only when it is an issue of religious and philosophic import but also in matters which have a political, social, and aesthetic bearing.

Without doubt it is the rounded development of Mr. Stawell, his effective possession of the cultural inheritance he describes, which alone made this volume of quintessential criticism possible. There is a fullness of sympathy and a fire of inspiration about his estimate, for instance, of mediaeval art, of Dante and Chaucer, of Donatello, that might lead to the conclusion that he comes to his task from a major field of aesthetic appreciation, were it not for the political chapters, which, being a rarely concise and suggestive summary of European experience in the realm of government, seem to point to a past of preeminently political specialization. Take such a chapter as that dealing with the empire and the church. While the opposed vital principles emerge in pregnant statement, the actual conflict is realized in a few, vivid phrases drawn directly from the documents. The result is an intellectual artistry which makes the reading of even the purely philosophic sections easy and delightful. It is difficult to see how the novel element which was contributed by Aquinas and later, by the moderns from Descartes to Kant could be given with more point and with more brilliance in the same contracted space.

Of course there are gaps, some of them hard to explain even from the authors' angle of approach. Bruno is overlooked as well as Locke, the latter probably on the deliberate ground that in the history of systematic philosophy he is unimportant. In connection with Locke the further merit calls for mention that these English authors have so far divested themselves of nationalism that they show no inclination to exaggerate the English share in building up the body of European culture. Without abandoning philosophy, further notable omissions are Comte, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, but with them we have reached the nineteenth century which is strangely and systematically slighted not only on the score of philosophy but on every other score, except perhaps that of science. Whether the complexity of the age overwhelmed the authors or its spiritual message failed to reach them, there is here a manifest failure of courage and a disappointing relaxation of grip, for which Mr. Marvin's humorous discovery, just before the curtain descends, of a world-wide religious revival as the certain earnest of a coming world union offers a wholly insufficient compensation.

FERDINAND SCHEVILL.

The Long Journey

The Long Journey, by Johannes V. Jensen. Translated by A. G. Chater. Volume I: *Fire and Ice*; Volume II: *The Cimbrians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$5.00.

IT has become the fashion lately to write epics of mankind, showing the long continuity of human effort. Wells, in his *Outline of History*, and Van Loon, in *The Story of Mankind*, have taken hold of the German science of *Weltgeschichte*—professed in the nineteenth century by bearded scholars—and remoulded it with journalistic facility. The former is a book, picturesque, but marvellously inexact; the latter is a nursery epic, written to captivate and instruct. And yet both authors hold to the traditional stand of the historian: even where their information is thin, they never consciously fictionize. Their convictions are what Croce calls “the undemonstrable conviction of the jurymen, who has heard the witnesses, listened attentively to the facts, and prayed Heaven to inspire him.” That is to say, they attempt to show the world realistically, as it has been since the day of primeval slime. But finally, the value of their conclusions depends upon the depth of their intuitions. In so far they have the nature of the artist.

Covering so vast a field, Jensen has preferred to make his work artistic in the narrow sense, presenting it in the aspect of the possible, of the imaginable. Thus *The Long Journey* is frankly fiction—intuition illuminating a very solid background of science. It is a series of stories, delightfully written, each of them covering an epoch: the two volumes which have appeared carry the men of northern Europe all the way from the ‘hot volcanic age of forest-life to the stirring times of the Roman Republic.

Undoubtedly the method has its advantages. It gives room for a great deal of pleasant satire, as when Jensen writes: “They two were alone upon the ice-sheet, the only human couple in the North. The sun broke through the clouds and saw that there were no others. Thus arose monogamy.” He can expand on those eras where his information is sound and use asterisks for the interim; and he never needs to say, as Wells does, “Now here again, with every desire to be plain with the reader, we have still to trouble him with qualifying statements and notes of interrogation.” There is no need to discuss issues of history or anthropology; what he does is to reach his own solutions and present them in clear, living pictures. They stand out amazingly vivid—learning fused and united by the flame of art.

Intimate human needs are what interest Jensen most—climate and love and the search for food, the recklessness of men and the frugality of women; and he shows how these are reasons for invention and migration. From being a horde of hairy animals in the forest, men become lords of farms and forests and wide fields, all because they demand a living from the world, and because some man arises with brains enough to master his surroundings. He is always an outcast, living apart from the herd, and learning through solitude. He is impetuous youth, breaking away from the circumspection of its elders; and he becomes an agent of thrilling change, with a new herd following behind him. Fyr, the forest man, is the only one to make discoveries for sheer joy, crowing on the mountain-top: because his memory was long enough to distinguish day and night, he wanted to touch the sun and count the days of the moon; and so he climbed the

volcano, lived in its upland meadows, and brought down fire on a branch.

With the coming of the Ice-age, however, all this was changed: Carl, the next Prometheus, “was one who could not yield. His heart fed on defiance, he grew in adversity. And when the primitive people were brought to the crossways between the cold and the forest, he was the one who chose the impossible. He became the first man.”

Fyr and Carl and White Bear are stalwart heroes, more interesting than the later figures. As the work grows larger, the descriptions of flowers and beasts begin to pall, and the endless repetition of living and loving and dying which is human life tends to grow monotonous. The attitude towards little children is increasingly sentimental; the strong, eager bond between a man and woman, which in early days was so fruitful of progress, has softened now that it is no longer rooted in economic need, and appears in the sentimental story of Cheiron and Vedis. The truth of Anatole France’s epigram becomes very apparent here, namely, that “the embarrassment of the historian increases with the abundance of his documents.” To cover the whole period of the European migrations, Jensen has been forced to invent a mythical figure—Norna Gest, who is minstrel and immortal, wandering from one age to the next and giving the book a crude kind of unity. The method which Jensen has chosen is one that is hard to sustain. It is an endurance test, a real tax upon the writer’s ingenuity, to keep it up for two volumes; and there is still a third to come.

ROSELEE COHEN.

Back to Rootabaga

Rootabaga Pigeons, by Carl Sandburg. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. \$2.00.

MORE tales of the Rootabaga country! It is a source of real delight that Mr. Sandburg brings to the children another revelation of that whimsical, altogether delightful land—the heart of their own America.

There is, it is true, the same unevenness of tone and material that was found in the first volume. A few of the stories have a stronger appeal for the child who grew up than for the child who is still in the process of growing. But it would be an unforgivable calamity to miss the best of both volumes.

Some of the faces are familiar. Blixie Blumber reappears and the Potato Face Blind Man tells new stories of true poetic vision—among them how it is that Slipfoot “nearly always never gets what he goes after” and why the lovely Deep Red Roses “decide to wait until tomorrow to decide again what to decide.” Here too is the unforgettable Bozo the Button Buster who bursts off buttons every time he draws breath to boast, and who, when he meets the fate of all idle boasters, is found to be nothing but a heap of empty clothes and meaningless buttons.

It is from Hot Balloons and his two daughters Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz we learn how the Shampoo River may be crossed into the Rootabaga Country. But the simplest way of all to reach it is to bury yourself deep within the covers of the books. And the most unhappy fate would be to get a slipfoot before you arrived there.

C. N.