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Exit, the Theatre! By St. John Ervine, on page 706

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Mene, Mene, Tekel

READERS of Philip Kerr's recent articles on England and America in this *Review*, must have noticed, perhaps with skepticism, his insistence that moral considerations were certain to reappear, as they have so often appeared before, in the political careers of the two English-speaking nations. If Lenin and Ghandi are not to triumph in these western relationships and the immediate future belongs to Hoover and economic imperialism, nevertheless capitalistic prosperity alone, self-interest alone, are not always to be dominant, if history can be trusted.

It may be added, "if literature can be trusted." The vital current of American literature can be seen from many viewpoints, but from all must present to the thoughtful student an eddying stream of opinion which surges against and sometimes over the barriers of selfish individualism. Or, looking more closely, it is not extraneous barriers which cause the back-rush and on-roar of opposition, but a conflict within the stream of American life itself, two currents of energy, each vital, but one a turbid rush toward material prosperity which began with colonization, and the other a tiny powerful current fighting the main stream, sometimes dominant, always sucking strength from the energy of the river, sreading thin, contracting to the heart of the flow, but always there—idealistic, spiritual—even in the muddy years after the Revolution, or the sordid tumultuous 'seventies, or now.

It is not without significance that, among our few really great writers, Emerson, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Cooper, were on the opposition benches always—and Poe and Irving, oblivious to politics, fought steadily against the materialism of the crowd.

Since the war, American idealism (to use a broad term for many related phenomena) has been in retreat. It has been easy to be unsentimental, self-seeking, skeptical of reform, indifferent to the future. The tempo of the nation has been in the stock market, its conscience has been usurped by the Prohibitionists,—as to its future we have been determinists, borrowing from our undigested science a comfortable philosophy, saying "Kismet" with an Oriental's indifference, but without his stoicism. There has been little passion in American thinking because passion has not seemed worth while.

Those who think this is a permanent psychology are deluded. They have failed to note the strength of moral will in the United States because that will has been involved in the muddle of Prohibition or debased into religious fanatacism. They have not noted the beginnings of the inevitable weariness which follows upon too eager self-regarding in a time of prosperity. Great works of constructive engineering in finance, in industry, in social service, in education, are under way, and the men who lead them are getting ample satisfaction; but that the millions who are not leaders should be endlessly satisfied with swapping goods and salesmanship, or that American energy should be confined to building things is incredible. We shall have "seekers" soon, and "come outers," and "abolitionists," and (one hopes) less violent thousands who at least refuse to live by bread alone. If Thoreau is incredible in a stock-broker's office, a population hanging upon brokers' offices and advertisements, as upon some miracle of Moses, may be incredible to a new generation with a stiffening of Thoreaus.

If there are to be new Luthers, Erasmuses, Emersons, it is very probable that they will rise in their dangerous might as a result of war, or the threat of "civilized war" which hangs over our culture like a tornado cloud, ominous but little regarded. The blind alley with a cockpit at the end in which society marches today is intolerable for any man willing to venture in thought beyond his own affairs. It is a situation which at the very moment of our fattest prosperity, in the midst of "this heavy-headed revel east and west," may explode into fanaticism, flame out in clear flames of ineffectual wisdom, or overturn in disaster the whole edifice of smug assumptions in which we have snuggled so complacently.

The morality with which we Americans have governed our public thinking is the negative morality of a fat animal, that is getting on with its food and drink, and will oppose instinctively whatever threatens change. We do not want war and, conscious of the swirling sub-surface current, weak but growing stronger, will pass resolutions that we

(*Continued on next page*)

The Hunter

By EDWARD DAVISON

I AM that hunter keen and strong
Who forced his horse with spur and thong
To the last ditch, but fell there tossed,
Breathless, broken, his quarry lost.

I saw the hill against the sky
Thronged with slower riders than I;
Men and women, a cautious crowd,
In at the death and shouting aloud.

Which of them loved the chase enough
To take a fall in a ride so rough?
Let them look at me limping home,
Twilight falling and night to come.

This Week

Next Week, or Later

British Culture*

By WALLACE NOTESTEIN
Yale University

WILL it ever again be possible to fuse into one work a history of British culture? Might a new Lecky have the intimate knowledge of each of many periods in British history as well as the grasp of relations between times and movements? It seems improbable.

There are too many things to know. Poetry, ballads, songs, plays, letters, diaries, autobiographies, account books, company minutes, diurnals, tracts, sermons, the material in print for any modern decade is more than can be read in a lifetime. And that is to say nothing of the tens of thousands of manuscripts heaped up in the muniment rooms of country houses. Nor would that be all. One must need study the documents written in the buildings of England, in the black and white cottages under Bredon Hill, past which a Warwickshire boy must have gone on his way to "Cotsall," in the great churches of Cotswold villages, that saw the heyday of sheep and wool; must note the hidden strips across the fields, "marks that show and fade like shadows on the downs," relics not always of the Flint men but sometimes of old manor lines. Could one but catch the unity of past and present as that young Cambridge don, too soon lost to the England he knew so well, who on a walking trip remarked with surprise the beehives on a Hertfordshire slope, telling his friend that there were beehives there in Domesday Book. One would have to hunt documents along the lynchets of the South Downs, to climb among the earth works of the Herefordshire Beacon, or stand above the Butter-Tubs and pick out what must have been the routes of trade west through the Yorkshire dales.

No one can do all that. It is asking too much. Cannot one then perhaps depend upon others? Cannot one confine his efforts to reading the monographs of others and fusing the results? Alas, the idea that A should do the grubbing and B make the fine generalizations is a kind of labor-saving device that has seldom worked in the historical trade. There are those who believe and have some warrant to believe that only he that gets his hands dirty with documents can attain to that intimacy of knowledge essential to the understanding of any time.

The trouble is that history is not a trade but at least partly an art. The mathematician or the biologist can build on the work of others. The historian has to do so, but never with the same assurance. History is sometimes called a science and its method should be as scientific as possible, but it is much more a craft that involves the selective eye of the artist. Amidst an infinity of materials the historian must choose what shall be treated, must pick out the characteristic; he has to use words, whose putting together must always be selective. Even the method of research, the conjecturing where documents will be found, calls for the artist's fancy almost as much as the scientist's reasoning; the appraisal of sources demands imagination as well as precision. If the historical processes are partly artistic it can be seen that the fusion of the art of others is a hard business. Let someone try to make a com-

* THE HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION. By ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1928. $12.50.

posite English landscape out of Turner, Constable, and Gainsborough.

This is all very discouraging, and it might well give pause to those so ready to demand the "new history" and the synthesis of results. Those agitating folk are thinking of history as a science, and wish to gather it into a system, or part of a system; they think to burst out into sudden blaze with some Einstein conception of the past.

But however little a science history is—and it has much to learn from science, as for example about the preliminary processes in devising apparatus, which are often imaginative—and however much it is an art, the historian in practice has to build upon the work of others or limit himself sadly. May it be possible that one man can cover a wide field of thought and achievement by utilizing the exploration of others and yet stopping himself to explore in every field, enough to see its best,

> its accent hit
> And partly sound its polity?

Exploring himself and substituting imagination for part of the exploration, might genius possibly read the whole history of English culture in the monographs of specialists and by a sympathetic comprehension of their finest shadings, by an ability to guess at what they knew more than said, might he by such a gift grasp the complicated forces behind the Peasant's Revolt or divine the soul of Sir Edmund Verney setting off reluctantly to fight for his King?

Such talent is possible to conceive, but hard to come upon. It is true that Maitland could throw out passages of divine insight about Elizabethan England, but even that supreme historical genius lost his hold a bit when he came down beyond the twelfth century. Galsworthy is easily an historian of imagination and sweep, but he has stuck pretty well to the upper middle classes during a period of about fifty years. G. M. Trevelyan, dowered with historical understanding, ventured recently on a general history of England. About the Age of Wycliffe, about the early Stuarts, and about the first third of the nineteenth century, fields in which at one time or another he had gone deeply into the [illegible] that it can overcome? Find another Maitland in some junior common room, bestow upon him long life, persuade him to forego that mastery in one field which he will covet, and ask of him a general history of British civilization, and there may yet be one to draw the bow of Achilles.

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It was then no mean enterprise upon which Mr. Wingfield-Stratford set out. He has given us in thirteen hundred large pages two interesting volumes, of which the first especially is one that lovers of England's story cannot overlook. It is the work of a widely cultivated man who has trapsed over his island with an eye for churches and their details, who has read much poetry and prose, some memoirs and letters, who has considered the philosophers and not overlooked the scientists, and who has embodied his gleanings in a kind of running comment on the progress of British civilization. It is comment that is never commonplace, usually entertaining, and often discerning. Hardly a page but has sentences that one would not miss.

He knows many of the men that cross his stage and stops pleasantly to discuss them, with freshness and point, sometimes with deep knowledge. A Strafford or a Charles II he can appreciate, but an Eliot or a Hampden are alien to his spirit. He does better with Ricardo than with Peel, better with a Chamberlain or a Kipling than with a Morley or a Meredith. The political story he hardly tells, satisfied rightly to comment upon it, but tempted now and again to fit it into categories, some suggestive, some artificial. On constitutional development he has a good deal to say; he has been at pains to read Maitland and Pollard, but not too much else, yet he knows enough to avoid the set traps. Parliament, however, the Privy Council, the Justices of Peace, and the Courts are subjects upon which he lacks intimacy of knowledge. His constitutional history is the lawyer-like brand of the common law and Coke; the scholarship that revealed the functioning of institutions is so new as to be unknown to him. History is not quite in his bones, nor the historical processes, institutions changing, differentiating, fusing.

Social history should of course be the center of any account of English culture, and it is to be said that the author is better in this field. The book is full of pat comment. Take this:

> It is characteristic of England that her own peasant revolt had comparatively little inspiration from abstract or even religious theory. There was more of Robin Hood than of Wycliffe in it, and it arose, as nearly all English—as distinct from Celtic—labor troubles arise nowadays, from a very concrete sense that the poor man was getting less than his due, that the bosses were not playing the game.

Enclosures and sheep-farming and the troubles they made, the author understands more or less—he has read his Tawney—but here again he is stepping carefully to avoid pitfalls rather than making a careful perambulation of his parish. If he knows about the life of the people it is the life to be found in certain favorite books rather than that in rent-rolls, ballads, and plays. Piers Plowman and Jack of Newbury get their due, but Skelton, Brinkelow, and Dekker would all have been to the purpose, none of them so far out of his way. He has picked his flowers—one can watch him picking—in the nearby fields and seldom looked beyond the woods. Reginald Scot devoted his life to the "more obscure authors that had by the generality been neglected." To some degree the historian must do that. By snooping in queer places he will find the very stuff to give imagination its lawful opportunity.

It is on the side of the Church and ecclesiastical thought and biography that the author is in his home fields. His discussion of the Reformation and Henry VIII, and of the ecclesiastical polity of Elizabeth deserves careful reading. The high Anglicanism of Lord and the beauty of holiness are vividly set forth; George Herbert gets his meed, but why should Launcelot Andrewes, whose shadow is not growing less, be left out? The fine flower of Puritanism within the Church would have been worth his consideration, or Richard Greenham and those "Practical Puritans," who were almost St. Francis and his followers come alive in the Cambridge country-side.

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His second volume begins with the Restoration and comes quickly down to the eighteenth century. [illegible] epigram than his point, and of one who can draw comparisons not only with the continent but even with Persia and India. Upon the industrial revolution he has wise things to say, but Robert Bakewell breeding sheep with meat on their bones for the new millions of the north gets hardly a hand. He mourns for those caught in the web of industrialism with a pity for human affairs which becomes the historian, but fails to catch the romance of railways or of the Bessemer process. In a brief chapter which he calls the Quintessence of Romance he brings together a series of "romantic democrats," Burdett, Admiral Cochrane, Cobbett, Shelley, Byron, and Keats, in characterizations that could hardly be bettered. In Coleridge's politico-religious philosophy and in Blake he has subjects after his own heart. He can strike the very notes of the eighteen-twenties, or hit off mid-Victorianism without becoming satirical. It is when he arrives at his own time, that his prejudices, never wholly concealed, appear. He follows the convention of antagonism to middle-class codes and idealisms. The great social reform movement of the years between 1906 and 1914 does not even enlist his attention. Those wonderful years between the Boer War and the Great War, the years of the Webbs and Lloyd George, the years of the old proud London, the glory and splendor of which Galsworthy has caught, he dubs "those hectic and frivolous years."

Galsworthy he might have used and a host of others whose novels are documents of modern civilization. He might have compared the countryside of Fielding with that of Trollope, or with that of Sheila Kaye-Smith. The growth of suburbia, with three or four of the novels of Wells for sources, would have afforded him comment on the decades before the War.

We must not ask everything. He has given us a synthesis of British history, choosing those views, as any artist, which suited his talent and pleased him. He is one with observant eyes and something more. Once in a while it is granted to him to look on the past as he might look on a landscape through the light that never was on sea or land, but that hovers nevertheless over England on half-misty afternoons, and makes of it no common earth but "Merlin's Isle of Gramarye." For such bits of imagination we must be grateful, and not ask for a Turner or even a Constable. It is a picture that deserves a good place on the wall. Be sure to stop and look at it.

Mene, Mene, Tekel

(Continued from preceding page)

do not want it. We do not want excessive armaments because they are expensive, and will hold back —a little—from the old race toward preparedness for the war that is inevitable when it is prepared for long enough. Yet we remember acutely that the last war was profitable—for us, and but dimly that all wars have not been profitable—even for us. We read that science has taken over war and given it a totality of destructiveness, that not even the victors escape—and leave our reading, as we leave the movies, with fading pictures of unrealities too sharp for an imagination, engrossed elsewhere, to hold. We have been told that the West is an economic unit, and largely a social one. We have been told that we shall be involved if others are involved when the scale is large enough. We admit (placidly) the frightful results of an Anglo-American struggle over sea power, a European struggle over land power. We are sleepily aware that not even the most convinced optimist can hold out a shred of hope that stronger navies, stronger armies, can ultimately save even the strongest nation from the consequences, social, material, spiritual, political, of armed conflict on the modern plan. And yet, a stolid if apprehensive animal, we look over the fence and then trot back to complacency. Or (like Mr. Simonds in this number of the *Review*) point out the approaching catastrophe, and shrug our shoulders.

Yield a point in the supremacy of the national state? But that might lead toward The League or A League of Nations, and we have agreed that we will not discuss the League of Nations! Pool our sovereignty for the policing of the world under a law of nations? But that might imply an equal validity for the rights of foreigners, shake the Con- [illegible] pasture, and let a few more rails be set on the fence!

This is the very slough and stalmate of conservatism—not the convinced Tory conservatism that has something chivalric and nobly stupid in it, where man, with a contempt for humanity in general, shouts *sauve qui peut*, and goes up or down, accepting the results of his combative instincts. Not that rather fine conservatism which has saved character even when it has destroyed men and states, but the bourgeois conservatism of property and business that will play safe until safe becomes dangerous and then fly into fanatical panic and heap its own sins upon circumstance.

Our leaders are reading history to little purpose. Let them read literature then, and particularly the literature of American idealism, which was not always called idealism when it was written. Let them note that American writers have for a century and more been describing the beast of property that was born with horns and an appetite, but no eyes for the future. Let them note also that this culture contains elements that will not be content with chaffering on a toboggan slide, with a crash ahead. It seems incredible now that even a million Americans could be found willing to look where our path is leading, or to protest against the outrageous cynicism of inviting a general war by inaction or ill action. It seems incredible now that even a respectable minority could be gathered to execrate the folly which spends millions in energy upon material development and hundreds upon prevention; incredible that even in a tiny minority the moral passion which has risen before in this country, hot if not clear, powerful if not always just, could break through stupidities into action. It is not incredible. And the longer we delay, the more violent and less reasonable the reaction.

A number of manuscripts of the Bernese scientist and poet, Albrecht von Haller, which have been distributed in libraries of different lands are to be returned to his native land. Von Haller was the first Swiss poet to write in "High German" instead of Swiss dialect. In the eighteenth century he was an authority on botany and medicine.