

The Viking Age

A HISTORY OF THE VIKINGS. By T. D. KENDRICK. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1930. \$5.

VIKING CIVILIZATION. By AXEL OLRIK. Revised after the author's death by HANS ELLEKILDE. Translated by JACOB WITTMER HARTMANN and HANNA ASTRUP LARSEN. New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation and W. W. Norton & Company. 1930. \$3.50.

Reviewed by OSCAR J. FALNES

THE Vikings at one time were ubiquitous. On the waterways of Eurasia and the western ocean they wove the network of a far-flung brigando-mercantile empire. Their activities, on one side, lashed the waters of Caspian, Black, and East Mediterranean Seas, and on the other, harrowed the coastal areas of Britain, Ireland, Francia, and Spain. At any time in the ninth and tenth centuries the seas and placid rivers of this crescent-shaped dominion might swarm with Viking adventurers, deploying for trade or plunder. By no means all of their exploits were predatory. Piracy and rapine alternated with honorable merchantry, and in some regions, as in the settlements of the north Atlantic, colonization and orderly life were a part of this stupendous release of energy.

The outburst was nothing short of panoramic and yet it has never been adequately portrayed in its totality. Mawer's little handbook, "The Vikings," was a good brief introduction. Keary's "The Vikings in Western Christendom," an old, standard but unfinished work, carrying the story only to 888 A. D., took up in detail one part of the story. Now Mr. Kendrick, a member of the staff at the British Museum, sets out to treat the whole theme with a thoroughness which it deserves. He has succeeded well. His narrative throughout is reliable, well-balanced, and comprehensive. Like a revolving camera it swings from the White Sea in the Arctic to the Moroccan coast of Africa, from the Caspian in Central Asia to Wineland the Good in America. There are lengthy chapters on Viking operations in Russia, England, Ireland, Scotland, and Carolingian France, with shorter ones on The Faroes, Wales, Iceland, Greenland, and America.

The first third of the book is a masterpiece in condensation. Here Kendrick has compressed in a readable account the monumental work which the last generation of north European scholarship has done in the field of northern archaeology, and in Baltic history just prior to the Viking age. He presents results that are refreshingly up to date. Where authorities clash he takes sides but he is not arbitrary; he has been spacious in his recognition of opposing points of view. These qualities are marked also in his closing chapter on America.

There are good sketches of Anglo-Saxon England and the Baltic regions of Beowulf's day. The disputed Geater of the great epic, have been associated sometimes with the Jutes, but Kendrick definitely identifies them with the Goths of Sweden.

On one matter he has been abrupt. He has little to say of any Viking contribution to the social or political life of western Europe. We should like to know what legacy the Northmen left, for instance, in Danelaw England. So far as he touches on the matter, he minimizes Viking influence; Normandy, he says, was Frenchified out of recognition within a century.

But his brevity on this point must not detract from the book's excellent qualities. Among these, there should be special mention of the twenty-eight clarifying map sketches. There is also a good index.

Turning next to the Viking homelands, we learn that there, too, the turbulence of the age upset accustomed ways of living and thinking. Foreign influences made their way to the far north and stirred social life into ferment. How this was reflected in Old Norse literature is the theme of Olrik's "Viking Civilization," a book that was first published a generation ago and translated into German and Swedish. Now at last it is available also to English readers.

"Viking Civilization" is an excellent introduction to some of the outstanding poems and passages in the ancient literature of the North. Olrik seeks to find in that literature a reflection of the Viking's philosophy of life. For the Viking did have a well-knit philosophy. Central to it, Olrik suggests here and elsewhere, was a dogged power of will, a grim conviction that once resolves were formed their consummation must be pursued with a steely consequence. In their fulfilment, the Viking rose to the

"pinnacle of existence," but often only in the hour of death.

Olrik was primarily a folklorist. He is, therefore, at his best in chapters on the myth, the ballad, the legend, and the Icelandic saga. "Icelandic Scholars," like the chapter on the ballads, treats of post-Viking developments, and in describing the island republic's intellectual life the author claims it to be without parallel elsewhere in the Middle Ages.

This use of the superlative is an exception. His tone is uniformly one of moderation. It bespeaks admiration for the Vikings while it is aware of their faults. Olrik thinks cruelty and blood-thirstiness may have been on the increase during the period. As a scholar he respects the limitations of his sources and his results are therefore more convincing than those of another Dane, Vilhelm Grönbech, whose more pretentious study of the same material has approached the dithyrambic.

Olrik's treatment is historical. He shows how a myth or legend has grown by accretion, how one stratum of mental life has been deposited after the other in a developing story. Occasionally he illustrates his point by weaving in an interpretation of a classic like "Hávamál" or "Völuspá." Several historic scenes are painted with vivid detail. There is the chieftain's hall where buzz and merriment subside but temporarily while the skald commands respect and silence; or the sacred heathen grove at Upsala with its repellent sight of skeletons hung in the trees,—mute remains of animals and even of humans offered in the sacrifices; or again the blood-sprinkling ceremony near mid-winter night in the temple of the Earls of Lade.

One of Olrik's premises is open to question. It may be doubted if Viking culture ever was as homogeneous a unit as he infers. Were the Vikings so alike among themselves and so distinct from other Germanic peoples? At times the author has his own misgivings. He concedes also that there are some who would not identify mental characteristics as closely as he does with racial types.

The translation is very readable and noticeably free of the awkward word order which clings often to current translations from the Scandinavian. A series of illustrations add to the book's attractiveness. There is a good bibliography of secondary works and an index.

An Allegory for Today

ROMAN HOLIDAY. By UPTON SINCLAIR. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

THOSE accustomed to smile a little deprecatingly at the works of Mr. Upton Sinclair may keep their smiles and possibly lose their deprecation if they take the trouble to read his latest story. The striking thing about this yarn is its crispness and lightness of touch. It is amusing and ingenious, and the principal object of the author's satire, a young American "patrician" who represents a sort of dovetailing of Babbitt and Henry Adams, gets a thoroughgoing run for his money.

The conceit on which the story is based is that the American republic may well be standing now just about where Rome stood between the fall of Carthage (see our own Great War) and the murder of the Gracchi, champions of the people's cause. The narrator of the story is knocked senseless in a motor accident and during his several weeks of convalescence from a fractured skull reverts, subconsciously, to his Roman prototype. His motor (he was a manufacturer as well as a crack amateur driver of racing automobiles) becomes a Roman chariot; his family and friends become Roman patricians; his employees, the "Reds," "Wops," "Bohunks," and other undesirables of his New England manufacturing town, fit into their several parallels as members of the Roman mob—in short, the characteristic types and tendencies of present-day America are turned into Roman terms.

This sort of allegory has often been used effectively for humorous purposes, and the gap between the periods compared, leaving, as it does, so much to the reader's own knowledge and fancy, often permits a writer to achieve effects of satire which might be beyond him were he to attempt seriously and in detail to attack the life which both he and his readers are living and with which they are intimately acquainted. Such has sometimes been the result in Mr. Sinclair's case. "The Brass Check," the last of his books which I remember reading, was a good deal

spoiled for me, for instance, because I happened to know something about the newspaper and magazine world which he lambasted there, and was put off by minor errors of fact and inferences that were sometimes absurd.

This particular sort of difficulty is dodged by such an allegory as this. Tiberius and Caius Gracchus are a long way from the younger La Follettes. Any resemblance which may be discovered is all to the good from the reader's point of view, and the differences don't bother him. The merit of Mr. Sinclair's work lies in the very real narrative skill with which he makes his jump from Rivertown to Rome; in fact, with which he tells his whole story; in his fairness to the principal character he picks to satirize, and the variety of contemporary matters which he contrives plausibly to bring into his Roman scene.

Pretty much everything, indeed, is there—everything, that is to say, that makes up present-day journalistic controversy. Prohibition and bootleggers, Russia and "Reds," traffic congestion, gasoline stations and hot-dog stands, the "younger generation," the plight of the old-fashioned small farmer, the drift to the city, collective action as opposed to old-fashioned liberty and individualism—these, and all sorts of other things, are very neatly transferred to ancient Rome. Young Luke Faber in the story is not at all a caricature; indeed, he is a good deal more subtly and sympathetically drawn than some of Mr. Sinclair Lewis's later characters. Very likely there were just such fine, upstanding, well-born, and well-bred, if somewhat socially petrified young Romans, and very likely many of our own "best people" resemble them more than most of us usually think.

"Roman Holiday" is a good story—exceedingly clever journalism, and with a neatness of characterization and a narrative skill which makes it something more than that.

Chaos and Eldest Night

(Continued from page 529)

but it is not its order that makes it great, but her satirical touch upon its absurdities which makes us realize, as we read, how brittle and how temporal are its fixities. Our modernists give us warnings: the incoherences of Gertrude Stein, Joyce's meddles of sense and nonsense informed by imaginative perception of the subliminal, the brutal assaults upon conventional diction of a Hemingway, the staccato interpretations of a Cummings are perhaps unconscious threats. Unreason presses upon all these and demands expression. They are our ultra sensitives and that is their contribution to art.

Of course if they do not make art, their contribution to its future will be no alibi. Innovators always take chances with immortality, probably because of any three innovations two are quite certain to be bad. The sensitives can seldom keep the nice mean between the infra and the super natural, and this they must do if they are to translate their perceptions accurately into a human tongue humanly understandable. Blake often failed. Shakespeare sometimes.

"Modernism" in art, whatever else it is, arouses an awareness of the realm of eldest Night and Chaos surrounding and impinging upon our man-made culture, calling for infinite adjustments like the wings of Satan as he fell through uncreated space. But the more ardent advocates of unreason and the shapeless should take warning from Hell's gates which, when Sin opened upon the "dark illimitable ocean without bound" of chaos,—

"She op'nd, but to shut
Excel'd her power; the Gates wide op'n stood."

The Saturday Review of Literature

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Published weekly, by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., Henry S. Canby, President; Roy E. Larsen, Vice President; Noble A. Cathcart, Secretary-Treasurer, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Subscription rates per year, postpaid: in the U. S. and Mexico, \$3.50; in Canada, \$4; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere, \$4.50. All business communications should be addressed to 25 West 45th Street, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 1, 1879. Vol. 7, No. 26.

The Saturday Review is indexed in the "Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature."
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The BOWLING GREEN

The Folder

PERHAPS some day some collector will pay us a sentimental visit to the ancient town of Colophon—in Asia Minor—and report what there is of bibliophile interest in the place whose name is so associated with books. Meanwhile, a suggestion to the editors of the *Colophon*, the book-collectors' quarterly: that they get Arnold Genthe's permission to reprint one of the extraordinary photographs he took in the Greek monasteries of Mount Athos last summer. It is a picture of a bearded old monk holding an antique tome and gazing aslant through his spectacles. (Perhaps they were bifocals, which I have been learning to use.) It is a perfect representation of the popular notion of a book collector.

As a matter of fact, insiders know that modern book collectors are often brisk Corona Corona fellows in the prime of sportsmanship, with Shetland plus fours and an efficient secretary to take letters. Their taste in books, as in liquor, is sometimes a bit uninventive, but they will always like things enormously when told what to like.

The *Colophon*, the bibliophile quarterly edited by Elmer Adler, Burton Emmet and John T. Winterich, has now begun its second year and deserves encouragement. Its novel idea of having the separate "signatures" prepared by different famous printers (both here and abroad) and then bound together, gives the student an interesting synopsis of various styles and methods. For the most part it has avoided eccentricity, and provides an interesting education in graphic design. But most appealing to me is its attempt "to give living embodiment to the emotional excitements and intellectual delights of collecting books." The first year's issues were largely over-subscribed, but it still operates at a deficit. I don't see why I should not remark that a year's subscription costs \$15 and can be sent to The *Colophon*, 229 West 43 Street, New York. I know that I was offered \$30 the other day for my set of the four issues of 1930.

Among the articles *The Colophon* has printed one of the most interesting is Francis Meynell's "Some Collectors Read," in the December issue. It is sprightly, charming, and sane. He tells the story of the now famous Nonesuch Press books, and I like particularly his allusion to the revival of interest in John Donne, and on good whiskey and parties for booksellers as a phase of the publishing business.

The three partners in the concern settled down in a cellar under the bookshop of Francis Birrell and David Garnett in Gerrard Street, Soho, and there tackled the donkey work of book production and the mule work of book distribution. It was an uncomfortable cellar, but a bottle of whiskey and two decks of cards warmed some of its bleakest hours. . . . For nearly two years we continued in the half light of our limited premises, varying the daily task with such occasional diversions as "invoice bees"—parties to which our friends were bidden in order to help us between drinks with the task of writing out invoices, "statements," et cetera.

Mr. Meynell makes many very sensible comments on the limited edition business, and he also tells us of the narrow escape the enterprise had from being called the Pound Press. This was Ralph Hodgson's idea, who had admired Mr. Meynell's father's seventeenth century "pound" (or garth.) Every book, he urged, should weigh a pound and cost a pound. He might have gone on to suggest that they all be written by Ezra Pound; which is why I say it was a narrow escape.

Another very sage remark is that of Michael Sadleir, who says: "In book collecting the prizes fall to birds who know worms when they see them."

For that reason we urge the ambitious bibliophile to keep an eye on *The Colophon*.

I was heartily pleased by Jonas Lie's comment—as quoted lately in the *New York Evening Post*—on American art collectors who buy nothing but old European masterpieces and bring them to this country. "They are not patrons of art but men engaged in the moving van business." The time to patronize art is while it is alive and kicking. If I were able to buy pictures one kind of artist whose work I should want to buy would be Grant Wood of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Some weeks ago I saw, in the rotogravure section of the *New York Times*, a photo of his gorgeous painting "American Gothic." It was shown at

the 43rd annual exhibit of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was purchased by the Friends of American Art for the Art Institute's permanent collection.

It portrays an American farmer and his wife, standing in front of their frame-and-shingle farmhouse. In those sad and yet fanatical faces may be read much both of what is Right and what is Wrong with America. The man's sombre eyes, tight lips, and the knuckled hand on the pitchfork, remind one of Oliver Cromwell. It seemed to me one of the most thrilling American paintings I had ever seen; so much so that I wrote to the Dorr News Service (331 West 14 Street) and spent \$3 for a photo-print of it; and anyone else who feels like doing so will be doing more to encourage art than by importing a wagonload of Murillos.

Another, and very exciting, way of keeping an eye on American art would be to have a look at some of the remarkable photographs of vegetable forms taken by Edward Weston, of Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. Such subjects as Kelp, Peppers, Squash, Cabbage, Succulents, Egg Plant, Celery Heart, sound unpromising to the ignorant; humorous even; but these photographs might astonish you. Laurence Bass-Becking, Professor of Biology at Stanford University, says "He shows living matter contorted like wrestlers' limbs, fighting the unseen forces of environment." The Delphic Studios, 9 East 57 Street, held an exhibition of Weston's photographs last October, perhaps they still have some. But they would not interest those who only see Art in what they have been taught to believe is "artistic." The photograph of Peppers is as surprising as some of Goethe's *Faust*.

And still another way to pay tribute to America is to reread *Huckleberry Finn*.

Potiphar, the famous cat of Kings Bench Walk, the Temple, London, went to the land of eternal mice some while ago, but he is still remembered by many Americans. The most remarkable London puss since Dick Whittington's, his host James Bone would tell you. Potiphar deserves his own little tablet on this turf, so I quote from Mr. Bone's charming article on "Temple Cats" in *Home and Country*:—

Potiphar was curiously affected by sound. There was a passage in a Beethoven sonata that affected him above all others and when my wife whistled or hummed this passage Potiphar had to come and jump on her lap and put his paw on her mouth and stop the sound. We never knew whether he hated or loved the passage, for he used to purr like a Daimler and yet he tried to stop the sound. He would come from upstairs or outside if he heard it. Some need in his nature compelled him to act like that. One afternoon we were honoured by a visit from Madame Galli-Curci who was immensely interested by the good cat's performance. Would the cat do his trick for her? Of course he would. Very well: and then the diva, seated on a couch in these Temple chambers, gave her first concert to a cat. The main performer however, was tired. He was getting an elderly cat and thought he had done his bit for the day. Still . . . there was a beautiful lady with such a voice singing his Beethoven passage. Oh, well: very slowly old Potiphar, after rolling over on his back once or twice by way of protest, climbed on her knee, adjusted himself on her lap and sat up with his paw raised. But Madame Galli-Curci's friends thought, properly enough, that no cat's paw, however talented the cat might be, should go near those precious lips, so Potiphar waiting with his paw up was not allowed to complete his act. He didn't seem to care. He was a great cat. Hail and farewell, Potiphar!

Not untimely, remembering recent remarks about Nobel prize awards, is what Thomas Mann says of his own. I quote from his most interesting *Sketch of My Life* published by Harrison of Paris and distributed over here by Minton, Balch and Co. (limited to 695 copies, at \$2.50.) Mann says:—

The year (1929) was not to close without alarms and excursions. The famous award of the Swedish Academy had, I knew hovered over me more than once before and found me not unprepared. It lay, I suppose, upon my path in life—this I say without presumption, with tranquil if not uninterested insight into the character of my destiny, of my "role" on this earth, which has now been gilded with the equivocal brilliance of success; and which I regard entirely in a human spirit, without any great mental excitement. And just so, in such a spirit of reflective and receptive calm, I have accepted as my lot in life the resounding episode, with all its festal and friendly accompaniments, and gone through it with the best grace I could muster—even inwardly, which is a harder matter. With some imaginative yieldingness in their direction one might derive the most priceless thrills from the experience of being taken up, solemnly and with all the world looking on, into the circle of immortals, of being able to call Mommsen and France and Hauptmann and Hamsun one's peers; but it is quensh-

ing to one's dreamy exaltation to reflect upon those who have *not* got the prize. . . .

It is an unnerving experience, to have come very publicly into the possession of a sum of money—as much as many an industrialist puts away every year and no notice taken of it—and suddenly to be stared in the face by all the wretchedness in the world, which the amount of the figure has stimulated to assail the unlucky winner with claims of every size and kind. There was something indescribably ugly, menacing, daemonic even, in the tone of the demand that reached out to clutch at the much-talked-of money. One saw oneself driven to a choice of two roles: either the mammon-calloused wretch or the simpleton who flings into a bottomless well a sum of money intended for other ends.

The *New Yorker* says, in its pleasant *Now It Can Be Told* way, that Boswell's *Johnson* is "definitely the type of book which you could never imagine anybody reading through at a sitting." That however does not necessarily condemn it. There are several other books in that class; such as Montaigne, or *Leaves of Grass*, or the Bible.

The excellent Marchbanks Press (bless its decent legible heart; one of the few job printers that has rarely gone hoolazoola over gadgetty printing and doodlebug art) has reprinted in a pamphlet John Bennett's powerful *Protest of an Oldtimer* which was first published in this review last July 26. What Mr. Bennett was protesting against was some phases of mumbo-jumbo printing and illustrating. If you should want to reread his piece very likely the Marchbanks Press (114 East 13 St.) would send a copy. Better still, reread John Bennett's fine old book *Master Skylark*, illustrated by that king of draughtsmen Reginald Birch.

W. S. H. suggests that Mr. Daniel Quilter (who is going to autograph 3,000 copies of his book for the Autographed Edition Club) is like Shakespeare at least in this, that he will need thereafter to rest his phalanges on a cushion, as Will does in the Stratford bust.

The Autographed Edition Club is a public benefactor; it has at last effected the final and long-required *reductio ad absurdum* in the autographing game.

We have occasionally chaffed the Modern Language Association for its ponderous march in the vestiges of the Muse. Therefore we make amend by stating that the December 1930 issue of its *Publications* contains one of the most horrifying and sensational stories in the history of literature. This is Allen Walker Read's paper on *The Disinterment of Milton's Remains*. In 1790 a coffin was dug up in the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, which was alleged to be that of John Milton. A group of ghoulish workmen broke open the coffin and for one whole day the curious were admitted to examine the remains for the price of a pot of beer. Portions of the skeleton were carried away and sold on the streets; a newspaper of the time sardonically reported that 104 of the teeth had been bought by curiosity-mongers. Mr. Read quotes a pamphlet by Philip Neve, published immediately after the scandal:—

Mr. Fountain told me, that he pulled hard at the teeth, which resisted, until someone hit them a knock with a stone, when they easily came out. There were but five in the upper jaw, which were all perfectly sound and white, and all taken by Mr. Fountain: Mr. Laming also took one from the lower jaw; and Mr. Taylor took two from it. Mr. Laming told me, that he had at one time a mind to bring away the whole under-jaw with the teeth in it; he had it in his hand, but tossed it back again.

Fountain and Laming, Mr. Read tells us, were both overseers of the church, a publican and a pawnbroker respectively. Mr. Read, after careful survey of all available testimony, says the conclusion is inescapable that the remains were actually those of Milton.

B. R. G. writes: "I have seen, in a bookshop in Hartford, Conn., a queer little book entitled *Homes of the Poets*, by Edward Swift, illustrated with photographs of the residences of Longfellow, Lowell, Poe, etc. Fair enough, but the publisher's imprint is exciting. It says: "Philadelphia A. Edward Newton & Co., 1887." The price put upon the volume was \$2.50. Do you think I should buy it?"

It is no part of our province to answer such inquiries, but as this sounds like the long lost and sedulously concealed First Item of the Caliph Newton's codex, not mentioned even by his bibliographer George H. Sargent, we advise our correspondent to spring upon it at any price.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.