

Letters to the Editor: *History vs. Propaganda in "European Civilization"*

Professor Goodenough's Review

SIR:—In your issue of February 8th you printed a review by Professor Goodenough of Yale, of the first three volumes of "European Civilization, Its Origin and Development," a work of which I am the Editor and the Oxford University Press the Publishers. Your reviewer will, I trust, modify his view that the book is not honest history when he has had the opportunity of seeing it in its entirety, for there are seven volumes in all and he has condemned it on three. Those three cover antiquity, the Roman Empire, and the Early and Late Middle Ages. It should not have surprised him if a work following European civilization through those centuries devotes a great deal of space to the religion which was at the core of that civilization. Because he has found a greater place assigned to the Catholic Church than he has been accustomed to find or relishes finding, he condemns the whole work as propaganda. That is a charge which is easily if very improperly brought against a collective work of this kind. There is no general history which has drawn its writers from everywhere about which it could not be made, no important general history which has not needed and used Catholic as well as non-Catholic scholars. Professor Goodenough is faced with three volumes containing work by eleven scholars, five of whom are Catholics. I do not object to his arguing, where he thinks there is ground, against the conclusions or methods of these scholars. I greatly resent and so do my contributors and the publishers, against whom your reviewer makes particularly unworthy innuendoes, the attempt to represent the work as planned as propaganda and "not even honest propaganda" to quote his words. The intention of the work is made plain in the preface; it does approach the story of Europe with a different emphasis to that usually found in histories in the English language. It is designed to illustrate the rise and fortunes of a civilization, unique in itself, common to the peoples of Europe, and closely bound up with historical and institutional Christianity. That is the basis of the work and it is avowed at the outset. But I have attracted contributors of the highest standing for all parts of my work because I left them quite free. They are men whose positions in the academic world should have placed them above the suspicion that their pens could be bought to write to a brief. Yet in his obsession with the idea that they have made themselves into a team of propagandists, passing the ball to one another, Professor Goodenough fastens on the work of men who are not in fact Catholics at all and says, for instance, of Mr. A. W. Gomme of Glasgow that his estimate of Greek mystery religions "fits his section into the plan of the whole work." So Mr. David Douglas of Exeter, lately of Glasgow, is accused of tendenciously writing to glorify the Medieval Church. Mr. Douglas is not a Catholic but he is a scholar, and to support his attack Professor Goodenough travesties Mr. Douglas's long contribution,



"WE DON'T MIND A DIRTY STORY SO LONG AS IT ISN'T FUNNY."

accusing him of omitting matters that he has not in fact omitted, and so on.

I write, in short, to protest against a review which under a guise of balance—for there is a great deal of praise scattered through the article—seeks to suggest that a number of scholars have been assembled and persuaded into sailing, under the colors of the Oxford University Press, on a pilgrimage of Grace on behalf of Rome. It is a grave charge but it is also a ludicrous one. The last century had many professors in New England seats of learning who attempted to refuse the name of learning to any history which did not support their strong Protestant prejudices. But such types are fortunately rare today, and it is now accepted that to assign a great place to the Catholic Church in the first fifteen hundred years of our era is merely to recognize a historical truth which was for long obscured by a conventional anti-Catholic bias.

EDWARD EYRE.

Professor Goodenough Replies

SIR:—I wish only to call your attention to the fact that as a Professor of the History of Religion I am far from minimizing the importance of religion in general, or of the Catholic Church, in the development of our civilization. I did not intend to imply, and am sorry if my review gives that impression, that all the contributors were involved in the tendentious formation of the story which on the whole seemed to me apparent. Professors Myres and Taylor, for example, have contributed articles admirable in every respect; if I have gone too far, and seen plan in what was, in the case of Mr. Gomme, mere coincidence, that was unfortunate. But I must stand by my original judgment of the three volumes pub-

lished, and can only appeal to the reading public for vindication, or condemnation, of my opinion. I shall certainly be most interested in the forthcoming volumes of the series.

ERWIN R. GOODENOUGH.

Propaganda or Sincere History?

SIR:—Professor Goodenough (reviewing the first three volumes of Eyre's "History of European Civilization" to which I contributed a very small section) argues in detail that this work "is designed to be a piece of propaganda rather than a history, propaganda for the Roman Catholic Church." With regard to the fact, the intention of the authors, I only wish to point out what I am sure Professor Goodenough would have made clear had he known it: many, even the majority of those who wrote the sections, and whom he names, are not Catholics, though they all (save myself) occupy distinguished positions in the world of historical scholarship.

But I am more interested in the general question which Professor Goodenough raises; whether a work which reads to him like propaganda can be sincere history. I, as a Catholic priest, am always delighted, though very surprised, if anything which I write on a question of general knowledge should lead others to believe in the Catholic religion, because I believe it to be true and to be of the greatest benefit to those who believe. In this sense all that I write may be propaganda, but does it necessarily prevent my writing from being sincere historiography? In these volumes I was entrusted with the section on the early history of Christianity. I presented an examination of the attitude of mind of the early Christians; my arguments were based entirely

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A Philological Romance

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States. By H. L. Mencken. Fourth edition, corrected, enlarged, and rewritten. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$5.

Reviewed by J. B. DUDEK

THIS new edition of Mr. Mencken's magnum opus is a phenomenal achievement. To call it an "edition" is misleading. Not only has the book been thoroughly revised, rearranged, corrected, and brought up to date, but, saving a few passages, it has been so completely rewritten and so much new material has been added—the present volume is double the size of its immediate predecessor—that, excepting the title and the author's name, it is an entirely new work. Here we have a scholarly discussion, in 325,000 words, of the development of English in the United States, but so diverting a piece of writing withal that, from preface to index (of course there is an index!), one is scarcely aware that it is a scientific treatise of the first order. A bulky volume of 800 pages plus, which no one perhaps will set out to read seriatim, it nevertheless tempts the reader who opens it timorously to skip joyfully from one charming page to another. He encounters adventure, romance, mystery. Finally he is spellbound, and sitting up, away into the small hours of the night, reluctant to lay down this philological "Anthony Adverse" without seeing it through to the finish. The publisher's advance announcement recommended the book for the bedside. Prudently, nothing was said of it as a cure for insomnia, for in that capacity it would assuredly fail. Mr. Mencken is not a writer to be read half asleep. Lest any one be discouraged by a book obviously impossible to dispatch at one sitting, let it be observed here that each chapter is so complete in itself that it may be read independently. Thus, the book may be divided into convenient slices, which need not be taken in order.

The first edition of Mr. Mencken's "American Language" came out in March, 1919. Limited to 1,500 copies, it was almost immediately exhausted. A second edition, revised and enlarged, appeared in December 1921, and a third, again revised and enlarged, in February 1923. This last has, heretofore, been the most familiar and popular. Although a relatively expensive book, sales were steady and comparatively large, five reprintings having been necessary. The work was published also in England, the first British edition being, with a few minor changes, the same as the American third; there is also a German translation, "Die Amerikanische Sprache," by Heinrich Spies (Berlin, 1927), much abbreviated, however, condensing in less than 200 pages

(including index) the American third which contained over 400 pages of text, exclusive of a long bibliography and the index.

The formal bibliography is wisely omitted in the Fourth Edition, but bibliographical references are given in abundant footnotes, frequently as interesting and witty as the text. Those who enjoy a hearty guffaw should by no means miss the third footnote on page 498, or the one on page 501. The latter has a Rabelaisian piquancy which, though never obtrusive, is not absent elsewhere throughout the book. The List of Words and Phrases, expanded to seventy three-column pages, is a veritable dictionary of 12,000 Americanisms, including the earliest Colonial loan words as well as juicy examples of modern slang. Non-English words discussed in the text, especially in the Appendix, are not repeated in the word list, but the proper names occurring in Chapter X are.

To quote from the author's preface, the reader familiar with former editions will find that this one "not only presents a large amount of material that was not available when they were written, but also modifies the thesis that they set forth." When Mr. Mencken first started writing on the subject in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* (1910),

the American form of the English language was plainly departing from the parent stem and it seemed at least likely that the differences between American and English would go on increasing. But since 1923 the pull of American has become so powerful that it has begun to drag English with it, and in consequence some of the differences once visible have tended to disappear. The two forms of the language, of course, are still distinct . . . and when an Englishman and an American meet they continue to be conscious that each speaks a tongue that is far from identical with the tongue spoken by the other. But the Englishman, of late, has yielded so much to American example . . . that what he speaks promises to become, on some not too remote tomorrow, a kind of dialect of American, just as the language spoken by the American was once a dialect of English. The English writers who note this change lay it to the influence of the American movies and talkies, but it seems to me there is also something more, and something deeper. The American people now constitute by far the largest fraction of the English-speaking race, and since

the World War they have shown an increasing inclination to throw off their old subservience to English precept and example. If only by force of numbers, they are bound to exert a dominant influence upon the course of the common language hereafter.

This argument, supported by conclusive evidence, is elaborated in Chapter I, "The Two Streams of English." Here is a delightful serio-comic essay on the discussions provoked by early Americanisms, the fury with which English reviewers and American pedagogues attacked them, the American writers' sympathetic attitude toward the "barbarisms," and their encounters with the English critics, in which the Americans patently scored. Not the least amusing is a discussion of sporadic efforts made in this country to impose the "United States" language by law.

The second, a very brief chapter, entitled "The Materials of Inquiry," setting forth the essential characteristics of the new language and enumerating the categories of Americanisms established by past observers, is partly reprinted from the previous edition but still considerably revamped. The third and fourth chapters are a history of the development of Ameri-



Ray Lee Jackson
H. L. MENCKEN

can-English from the arrival of the first settlers up to and including the Civil War, but words borrowed from Indian tongues, from the Dutch, French, and Spanish, are amply discussed, as also the fashioning of neologisms from English material. The period covered by Chapter IV was enormously fertile, and during it the language acquired most of its present distinguishing marks. The fifth chapter treats at length of word-formation processes now active. The sixth demonstrates the vast influence of American on parent English. It is here that Mr. Mencken most plausibly contends that the two languages remain definitely unlike, even in honorifics, euphemisms, *verboten* words, and expletives. Chapters VII and VIII deal admirably with American pronunciation and spelling, respectively; and in Chapter IX is the first formal grammar of the American vulgate ever essayed. Perhaps the finest chapter in the book is the tenth, "Proper Names in America." Surnames, given and place names receive hospitable attention, and there are startling revelations.

A book the size of Mr. Mencken's already formidable tome would not suffice for an adequate survey of American