

# Reporting the Far East

*INSIDE ASIA. By John Gunther. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1939. \$3.50.*

Reviewed by VARIAN FRY

ALMOST everybody who has read anything on international affairs in the last three or four years has read John Gunther's "Inside Europe." That entertaining and informative book has gone through almost innumerable printings, and has been translated into a dozen or more languages. It has been several times revised and brought up to date. And if, from the point of view of the student, its author has betrayed at times a too-great fondness for anecdote and personality, and has allowed that fondness to obscure his view of the important social and economic causes of the events with which he has dealt, at least the candid student has had to admit that, thanks probably to his eleven years as a newspaper correspondent in Europe, Mr. Gunther has been able to give his book a vividness and an authority such as very few books on so ambitious a scale possess.

Now comes "Inside Asia," which attempts to do for a continent five times as large and nearly three times as populous what the earlier book did for Europe. Starting in Japan, "Inside Asia" takes us to China by way of Manchukuo and the undeclared war in the Far East; thence to the Philippines, Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies, Siam; to India, Iran, Arabia; and, finally, to Palestine. It is a journey of some 30,000 miles or more, and one for which Mr. Gunther has had no such preparation as he had had for the writing of "Inside Europe." Indeed, with the exception of a little reporting done in the Near East, he had not visited any of the places he writes about in "Inside Asia" until he set out on a trip to gather material for it, about two years ago.

To state that fact is to say that "Inside Asia" is not as good a book as "Inside Europe." And it is not. Partly, perhaps, because of the author's relative unfamiliarity with his subject, and partly, no doubt, because of the insurmountable language barriers he encountered, even more than the earlier volume "Inside Asia" takes refuge in anecdote and personality. There is so much personality, in fact, that whole pages are rather like an oriental "Dictionary of National Biography": even the most avid Gunther-fan will probably find himself skipping the interminable thumb-nail sketches of the lives of some two dozen assorted Chinese generals and politicians, for instance.

Even more than the earlier volume,

too, "Inside Asia" skims lightly over the surface of events, leaving many basic facts and trends to the examination of less "colorful" writers. Thus one looks in vain for more than a single sentence on the Chinese industrial coöperative movement; or for even a sentence on the crucial fact that China has an almost completely decentralized economy.

There is in "Inside Asia," too, a kind of running thaumatology which reminds one of Herodotus and the books of a long line of wide-eyed Westerners who have traveled in the East since his day. In fact, the parallels

between Mr. Gunther's tales of wonder and those of Herodotus are often quite striking. There are a good two hundred such wonder-stories in "Inside Asia."

Yet, despite its little flaws and blemishes (there are a few slips), "Inside Asia" is, all things considered, a remarkably good job. It is packed with information. It is eminently fair. It is highly readable. To the reader who does not know as much as he would like to know about the East—far, Middle, or Near—it will prove as pleasant and easy an introduction as any book available.

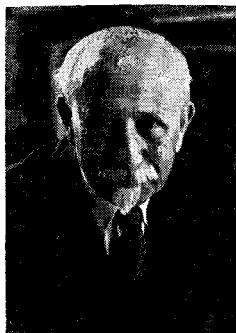
*Varian Fry is on the staff of the Foreign Policy Association, and is the author of "War in China."*

## President Neilson

*NEILSON OF SMITH. By Hubert Herring. Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press. 1939. \$1.50.*

Reviewed by THOMAS W. LAMONT

WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON, who after twenty-two years in office is now retiring from the presidency of Smith College, has been for years the acknowledged dean of the women's college presidents, and has attained high place among the heads of all American educational institutions. Therefore it is fitting that his character and virtues and career should have place in daily press and current periodical literature. Mr. Hubert Herring has done us a service in reproducing in book form his charming essay (*Harper's Magazine*) of a year ago. Mr. Herring paints a lively and just picture of Dr. Neilson, of his vivid personality, of his academic ideals, of his Scotch caniness in administration. More than one episode is quoted, going to show that the Neilson sense of humor has been a trait far more than kindly and endearing: it has been one source of his greatest strength in handling in these difficult days the complex problems of a student body and faculty of upwards of 2500 persons. To a former trustee of Smith College who in 1917 witnessed the transition from the preceding regime into President Neilson's competent hands, some of Mr. Herring's phrases have especially strong appeal. He speaks of the "sense of life . . . transmitted to all who come under his eye"; of the disdain which Neilson has always had for intellectual mediocrity, and of his "enthusiasm for scholarship."



William A. Neilson

It was that quality that so impressed his colleagues in the institutions of learning where Neilson had been a teacher in the early 1900s. And when in 1917 I journeyed to Cambridge to consult the venerable ex-President Eliot, who had first placed Neilson in the English Department at Harvard and then later had given him his professorship, he testified as to Neilson's ripe scholarship and extraordinary qualities as teacher. Then, in that impressive Eliot manner, he alluded to those Scotch traits of Neilson's and charged me to assure my associate trustees of Smith that, not only as an educational leader, but as an administrator, he would never fail them.

But to the college generations of young women who under President Neilson have worked and played and learned to use their minds in these last twenty-two years, it will not be Neilson the scholar, Neilson the administrator, whose bright memory will be chiefly cherished. It will be Neilson the man, the kindly, sympathetic human being, the person of understanding, the teacher who through his daily contacts with them gave them insight into questions of national and international import, who above all showed them the beauty and delight of life, the power of the human spirit, trained and yet made free. As in King Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey says:

When I am forgotten, as I  
shall be,  
Say, I taught thee;

so these thousands of young women graduates will for years to come be saying to their daughters: "We were at Smith under President Neilson!"

# Rome's Final Crisis

THE CAMBRIDGE ANCIENT HISTORY. Volume XII: *the Imperial Crisis and Recovery, A.D. 193-324*. New York: Cambridge University Press (The Macmillan Company). 1939. \$10.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

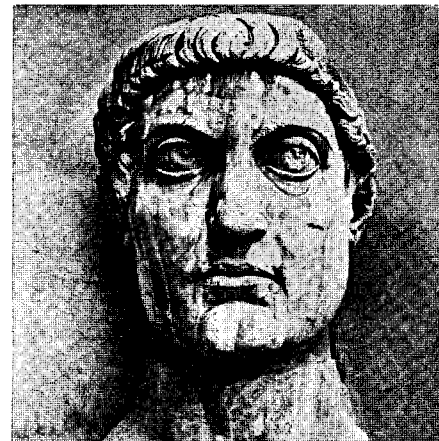
WITH this volume, ending with the Christianization of the Roman Empire under Constantine, a monumental work of scholarship is completed at last. Fifteen authors of seven nationalities share the writing of the present volume, so it is not surprising that different chapters sometimes give very dissimilar versions of the same events; the chief bond of unity is the strongly pro-Christian flavoring of all the chapters except those written by theologians. Neither harmony nor contradictions, however, will be much of an obstacle to people who read this history at all; for it is intended for students who know at least something about the subject-matter, not for the general reader, who would seldom be able to see the forest for the trees. Even the trees are often blurred, in a period for which the literary sources are so scanty and untrustworthy that much of its history must be reconstructed from the coinage; and the scholars who write this volume aim at accuracy rather than lucidity.

Professor Rand's dry comment on Aulus Gellius—"his prose shows a quiet absence of style, as befits so learned a man"—is unfortunately applicable to most of Rand's co-authors; you will find here none of the sweep and drive that Rostovtzeff, for instance, put into the narrative of the same events, even in a volume devoted to the more prosaic aspects of history. Accuracy (if you can get it) is the cardinal virtue of the historian;

but is there any law compelling so many sound men to be dull? That world organization of scholars toward which some gestures have lately been made might well pass a statute requiring every man who wants to write history to take a course in composition under, say, G. P. Baker.

Few scholars would regard this as a valid criticism; but a semi-general reader cannot help wishing that there had been some attempt to make the history of this period intelligible to the average customer. For it may very well prove to be a preview of the World of Tomorrow, and indeed is in many respects a preview of the world of today.

A time of violence and bloodshed and disintegration, of revolution and dictatorships, confiscations and blacklists and massacres. When German tribes reaching out for *Lebensraum* were extirpating more advanced cultures; when increasing taxation and currency inflation still never quite met the deficit; when profits vanished, the rich were ruined, and the poor were no better off; when the government could be suspected of setting fire to a public building in order to find excuse for the proscription of a minority sect, whose doctrines looked forward to a world revolution after which pre-history would have ended and history could begin. When desperate conditions evoked desperate remedies, including half a dozen schemes of moral rearmament that got nowhere (it was Christian theology and polity that ultimately triumphed, rather than Christian ethics); when most of the gifted writers, feeling that this was no time for comedy, devoted their talents to sectarian controversy; when the need of unity was so generally felt that men in authority could set the police to



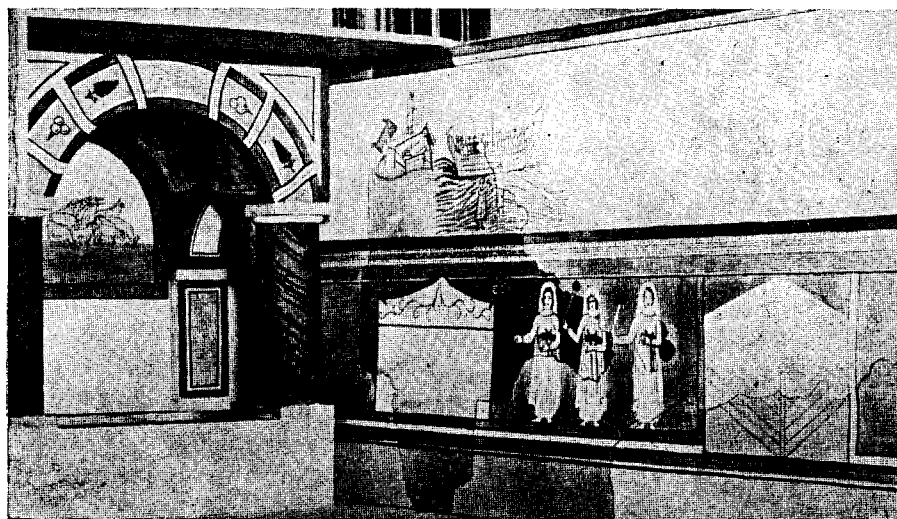
The Emperor Constantine

enforce conformity of opinion, even in support of something they no more than half believed themselves; when many skeptical and intelligent men turned back to the old-time religion, not because they had faith in it, but because they felt that they ought to support it as a force for political and social stability. When the world was full of refugees; and the persecuted of today could sustain themselves by the faith that God was on their side, and that they would become the persecutors of tomorrow.

Eventually there was "recovery," but a recovery into Fascism—at least something that was Fascist in its economic and most of its political aspects. Diocletian's restoration, however, failed to provide the emotional uplift that Fascism offers as compensation for hunger and hard times; it was left for the age of Constantine to furnish that, with the ultimate satisfactions postponed to the farther side of Jordan. In the Manichaean cosmology this world was known as The Smudge, whose prospective erasure was contemplated with a satisfaction which once more begins to be as intelligible as it was in the third century.

These ominous similarities, inconceivable when the "Cambridge Ancient History" was begun, have left their mark here and there on the point of view of the writers of these concluding chapters—not always as optimistically as in Professor Alföldi's remark that the Gothic atrocities imply "no ethical inferiority of the German race, but the clash of two worlds at different levels of culture." On the whole, there are no startling novelties of interpretation; but this volume does complete a process that has been going on for years, and puts the capstone on the rehabilitation of the Emperor Gallienus—one of Rome's greatest men, than whom no man, till lately, ever got a worse break from history.

"In every art that he attempted," said Gibbon, "his lively genius en-



Third century Christian church at Doura: reconstructed model