

## "An Age of Goodness I Knew"

*HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY.* By Richard Llewellyn. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1940. 494 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

**T**HIS full-bodied, full-flavored novel is romantic and frankly sentimental, but its romanticism embraces much earthly realism and its sentimentality has bone and muscle with which to make itself respected. In the singing rhythms of Welsh speech Huw Morgan tells the story of himself and his family and his coal mining village, as this tale was lived during some three decades that ended thirty-odd years ago. He speaks as a man of sixty or so, looking back upon his childhood, youth, and early manhood, and, whatever turnings the tale may take—whether they lead through scenes of beauty or ugliness or homely well-being—those Welsh rhythms always sing one nostalgic song: The old times were best, and they are gone forever. "An age of goodness I knew, and badness too, mind, but more of good than bad, I will swear. At least we knew good food, and good work, and goodness in men and women. . . . How green was my Valley, then, and the Valley of them that have gone."

There was badness, yes, but it grew only with the growing badness of new times—mounted with the heaps of slag that rose and spread like lava to blacken the green of the valleys. When Huw's father and mother were married, the slag had not yet shown itself above ground. There was steady work for all in the collieries, and the good pay was in jingling sovereigns. When the Saturday whistle went, the women put stools outside their doors and sat waiting for the men to come up the hill, and the men came and threw their wages, sovereign by sovereign, into the laps of the women. "My mother often had forty of them, with my father and five brothers working. And up and down the street you would hear them singing and laughing and in among it all the pelt-ing jingle of gold. A good day was Saturday, then, indeed." The tin box on the mantelpiece was always heavy. There were a dozen hams in the kitchen, and hens in the yard. The folk of the Valley worked hard and lived well. Physically satisfied, they found spiritual satisfaction at Chapel. They walked in the fear of God, but not too fearfully; cleanliness was almost a second religion, and fair-dealing a faith. Reason for happiness in one family was enough to make all celebrate—sorrow was communal. They were glad and proud to be Welsh,

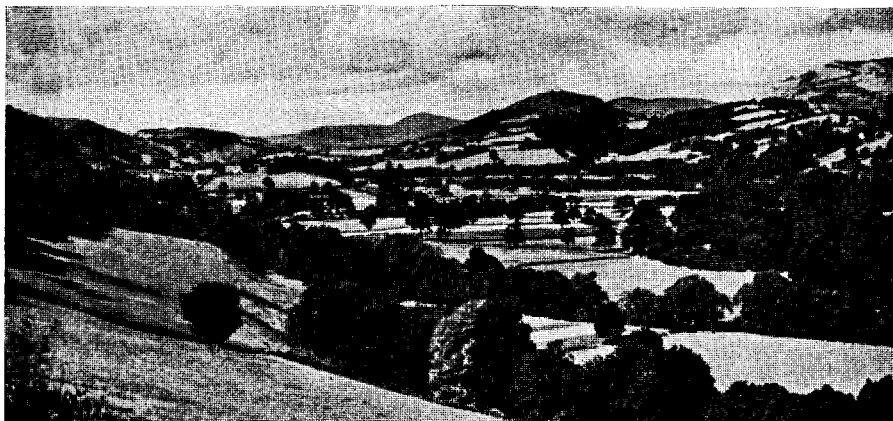
and England was a foreign country far away.

Then came a time when wages were cut and a new order of things began. Huw's father, Gwilym Morgan, who was a leader in the Valley, put his trust in reasonable argument; but argument failed, and the men struck tentatively, doubtfully, without organization. They won the strike, but their wages were lower than before. That was only the beginning. Other strikes were ahead, and increasing bitterness. Davy and Owen worked hard to build the union, but they were struggling against forces that bore them down with the years. The closing of a single pit left four hundred men idle. Times grew ever blacker as the slag rose. Strangers appeared in the Valley, with the names of Marx and Hegel on their tongues—they found hearers, and a new spirit possessed the men. And to those like Huw Morgan it was a great pain to know that the brave ideas, "and the brave ones of early days, had all been forgotten in a craziness of thought that made more of the notions of foreigners than the principles of Our Fathers." The alien notions prevailed, and at last there was war in the Valley. But that came after the Morgan sons had been scattered abroad, and Gwilym himself did not live to see much of it. Fighting to the end against forces he believed to be evil, he died in the earth where he had worked so long, and his death was the crown of his living.

At the heart of this Valley history are the Morgans and those with whom their lives were most closely linked, and at the very center is Huw, through whose words past things live on. Around the growing boy the web of drama, domestic comedy, and tragedy is spun; and with his growth, and his increasing understanding of life, this web becomes increasingly com-

plex. The strands of the tale are many and various, deftly and honestly interwoven, and each gives strength and substance to the whole. Life's poetry and prose are both embraced by a way of thinking and feeling and by a writing style that are capable of compassing both. The texture of the narrative is enriched by a wealth of detail—thought, felt, and observed. No message of the senses is too trivial to be undeserving of a worthy record, and so the author has time for such things as the taste of brandy broth, the smell of tweed, and the feel of good wood when worked by sharp tools. A little passage on the art of tickling trout is no more scamped in the writing than is a longer passage on the significance of kissing or the lyric description of Huw's finding manhood with Ceinwen. Every one of the many characters who people this book crosses the threshold of reality, and, best of all, the pull of the story is like the pull of a strong tide, with the difference that we have no wish or need to resist it.

Doubtless it will be argued that the novelist has exaggerated the greenness of Huw's Valley, as he knew it as a boy and as his father knew it before him; that Huw, looking back through a sentimental mist of memory, has ignored the blackness that was already there. Nor do I doubt that statistics and documents in plenty can be mustered to support the argument. But the novel, as novel, will still stand sturdily against any such onset. Dissenting opinions will be written, too, by those critics who must be fashionable at all costs—for "How Green Was My Valley" lies outside the range of "significant fiction" as that range is delimited by present critical fashion. But it belongs to a line and a tradition that have outlasted more than one fashion. In the many-mansioned house of literature there is place for the Llewellyns as well as for the Steinbecks, and literature will be the poorer if there ever comes a time when there is not.



The Valley of the Dee. From "The Land of Wales" by Eiluned and Peter Lewis (Scribners).

# A Major Crisis of Civilization

THE EMPEROR CHARLES V. By Karl Brandi. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. 655 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

WHEN Charles of Hapsburg was born at Ghent in 1500, the Middle Ages were drawing to a close. But at the Burgundian court, where Charles passed his youth amid the splendor of the Indian summer of feudal chivalry, there was no one to foretell the approaching tempests soon to sweep Europe, soon to tumble the ruins of the old faith and unity, the old self-satisfied parochialism and semi-isolation about men's startled ears. Charles was fated to be the last Holy Roman Emperor worthy of that universal name at a time when Europe definitely turned its back on the amorphous homogeneity of the past to split up into warring nations and hostile churches; he was fated to be the guardian of European unity, of the established order and the ancient faith in an age as full of change and struggle as our own, an age of bitter ideological strife, cutting across boundaries and dissolving old allegiances, an age of naked power politics, cynically indifferent to treaty obligations, brutally trampling on sanctions the past had held sacred, an age of new and terrible forms of warfare, and, above all, of rapid, mysterious, disturbing economic change. In the confidence of youth Charles took for his device the pillars of Hercules with the daring motto *Plus ultra*; he should have taken Hercules himself overburdened with the task of Atlas. All his life he struggled to hold up a falling world.

Yet he hardly seemed fitted for so heroic a task. The heir in his cradle of more lands than any European dynast ever inherited before or since—the rich cluster of Burgundy's duchies and counties from the North Sea to the Alps, the German territories of the Hapsburgs, Ferdinand and Isabella's newly united Spain with its Italian conquests and its vague overseas possessions in the Americas—he was given, nevertheless, the narrow education of an old-fashioned Burgundian nobleman, complete with a full set of feudal prejudices and a comprehensive ignorance of almost everything else. His physique was unimpressive, his health was far from rugged, and his intellect was certainly no more than mediocre. Thus slenderly equipped he came into his full inheritance at twenty and had, thereafter, to concern himself with Mexico and Peru and the Indies, with Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic, as well as

with the intricate meshes of major European diplomacy and the internal government of his many realms. He had to defend Germany and the Mediterranean against the Turks, and all his frontiers against the French, fight heresy and schism at home and abroad, and sometimes fight the pope at the same time, try to make modern states out of his medieval domains, and be always alert against revolt among his subjects who, princes, burghers, and peasants, were all stirred by the obscure ferment of the times, the painful passage from one stage of society to the next. Thus burdened, and condemned, moreover, by circumstance and temperament to fight a life-long rearguard action against the inexorable advance of history, one would expect the backward, hesitant Hapsburg



Charles V at 32—portrait by Christoph Amberger.

prince to cut a sorry figure in opposition to such brilliant children of the Renaissance as Henry VIII, Francis I, Guilio de Medici, or Soliman the Magnificent, and to pale into insignificance beside such geniuses of revolution as Martin Luther or John Calvin. In fact, the emperor held his own against the lot of them, and he commands our admiration as often as any of his formidable adversaries. Charles V may stand as the type of the ordinary, ungifted mediocrity who, from the very magnitude of the burden he determines to bear, draws the strength and stature of a hero.

Any biography of Charles V which tries to tell the full story of the man's growth is thus unextricably involved with the whole history of Western civilization in a major crisis. The problems such a biography presents might daunt a giant. Materials for it include

thousands of printed books in seven or eight languages and many thousands more of unpublished documents in various deposits; to understand and interpret this material requires a firm grasp of almost every aspect of Europe during more than half a century of complex development. No wonder that, in spite of the fascination of the subject, it has never been treated with real success until now. Fortunately Professor Karl Brandi of the University of Göttingen has been spared to crown a long lifetime of strenuous study with the book to which his studies have always looked forward. One wonders whether there has ever been before, or will ever be again, a work of this scope so firmly based on original, unpublished sources. Sometimes a single paragraph is supported by phrases from documents at Vienna, Turin, and Simancas, all held firmly together by an Olympian command of the perspective of history. It is tempting, but idle, to speak of this book as a monument of the best type of German scholarship. Its scholarship, like its viewpoint, transcends national boundaries. Except for a few phrases, it might have been written by a Frenchman, a Spaniard, a Dutchman, or a Dane. But it could only have been written by an intellectual athlete trained in that tradition of patient, clear-eyed devotion to objective truth which is the best thing Europe has given to the world.

Two years ago this reviewer fine-combed the German edition, looking for errors of fact. He found none worth mentioning. On rereading, the enormous labor of the scholarship and its meticulous accuracy seem less striking than its unobtrusiveness and the literary art with which a vast mass of information has been condensed and marshaled to serve the central theme. This is a political biography. Charles as a human being is considered only so far as the human being influenced the decisions of the statesman. To recapture the atmosphere of Charles's mind the biographer has gone far afield, to portraits, to architecture, to old books of chivalry and court ceremonial, to the light literature of the period. But since Charles's policies were rarely much affected by his personal relationships, the few tidbits of scandalous gossip about him are barely glanced at. In these pages Charles is drawn with something of the coldness and formality of court portraiture; the touch suits the character. For personalities and tittle-tattle there are other biographies. But there is no other which analyzes so well the forces within and without the man which influenced his actions, none which conveys so vivid a sense of the issues in which he became entangled, or raises, by sheer