

Greek Antiquity

THE ANCIENT GREEKS. By William Kelly Prentice. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1940. 254 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by C. A. ROBINSON, JR.

ONE of my great experiences as a young undergraduate was when I elected to take an advanced course in the "Iliad" with Professor Prentice. On the first day he gave me the longest assignment I have ever received—much longer than I would ever dare myself to give—and subsequently we spent an afternoon discussing my sophomoric report. Our task was to discover whether the "Iliad" is occupied with the events of forty-nine or fifty consecutive days, a problem which is, no doubt, insoluble, for I see in his recent book that Mr. Prentice is still undecided. We ended the afternoon by looking up Seymour's opinion, and I was careful to remember that the famous Yale professor was a good person to know. In my next report I referred incidentally to Seymour as an authority, and it was then that Mr. Prentice took off his glasses (as he was to do so often in later years, too) and for five memorable minutes explained to me what his reaction would be if the Archangel Gabriel should suddenly appear and announce himself as an authority.

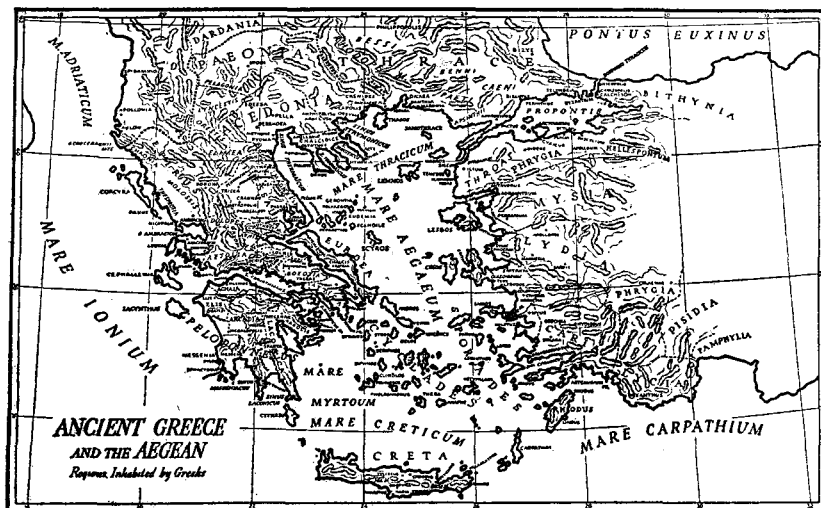
This same passion for truth, for clear thinking and understanding, characterizes Mr. Prentice's writing, of course, and we can only hope that he will give us more volumes in the years to come. The present book has as its subtitle, "Studies toward a Better Understanding of the Ancient World." Layman and scholar will leave this book with a better understanding not only of antiquity but also of our own world; both readers will marvel at the precise writing, but the scholar will also be shocked to see one of his convictions after another gently qualified

or demolished. For example, the many excavations in various lands have without question added tremendously to our knowledge of antiquity and have vitalized every branch of classical studies—a fact that helps to explain why so many hundreds of students elect courses in our classical departments. It is refreshing, nevertheless, to be told by Mr. Prentice that "it is true that not much new information about Greek antiquity has been acquired in the last century, in spite of many excavations." The point is that the history of any people is recovered by a study of their monuments and writings, and so far as the ancient Greeks at any rate are concerned our chief source is still the literature. By a searching scrutiny of this literature and of modern works on it Mr. Prentice not only shows that we do not know as much about the Greeks as we suppose, but also turns a strong and new light on what is known.

The book is intensely interesting as well as provocative. Mr. Prentice says, for example,

Nor was freedom of mind promoted in any large degree by democratic institutions. The perfect fruit of democracy seems to be standardization, which is a blight upon individuality. That Athens under its democracy became the intellectual and spiritual leader of the ancient world was due partly to the innate talents of its people, and partly to the fact that Athens for a long time was the chief center of intercourse. Athens might have been that under an intelligent monarchy or oligarchy.

I am sure that Mr. Prentice is wrong, but I have not yet been able to formulate a bill of particulars that I would be willing to submit to my friend and teacher, unless we were to say, simply, that the great achievements of Athens were in fact won under democracy and that her chief faults were those of an imperialistic capitalistic democracy rather than those of an absolute democracy.



Copyright map from "The Life of Greece," by Will Durant.

Author, Author!

IN BRIEF: André Malraux ("Man's Fate," "Man's Hope") has been released from prison and is now at liberty in unoccupied France. He is at work on what he considers the most important novel of his career. . . . Roger Martin du Gard ("The World of the Thibaults"), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, has been heard from for the first time since the German invasion of France. He escaped from his home in Normandy as the Germans advanced, finally reached Nice by way of Bordeaux and Vichy. With him on the long and dangerous journey was his wife who had to be carried the entire distance in a plaster cast because of a broken arm and shoulder. The author's home was ransacked, his books and papers destroyed. Stuart Gilbert, translator of "The World of the Thibaults," managed to get away with the last part of the English manuscript on one of the last boats from France. . . .

★ ★
Frank Munk ("The Economics of Force") tells a story of his arrival in New York in the summer of 1939. Two friends came to see him at his hotel. As the three began to speak in Czech, Mr. Munk automatically took off his coat and put it over the room telephone. Noticing the surprise of his friends he suddenly remembered that he was no longer in Prague, but in New York. Mr. Munk explains: "After the German occupation of the Czechoslovak capital talking over the telephone became a dangerous job. We knew that several hundred persons were employed at wire tapping and that many persons were being arrested continuously for speaking too openly what they really thought. It was rumored—and generally believed—that the Germans had a device enabling them to listen in even when the receiver was hung up. In the atmosphere of creeping terror it became one's second nature to look for the telephone first when entering a room, and to cover it before opening one's mouth." Mr. Munk says it is an immense relief to be free again. He is now in the Division of History and Social Science in Reed College.

★ ★
W. J. Cash ("The Mind of the South"), author of "Literature and the South" in the *SRL* for December 28th, has just wired his publishers as follows: "Jacket on my book says Mr. Cash has never married. He has now. Mrs. Mary Russ Northrup, of Charlotte, N. C., and I were married Christmas morning." There will probably still be time to change the jacket.

EUGENE ARMFIELD.

The Anniversary Crop

CARL P. ROLLINS

IT is natural human curiosity which wants to know more about the Rhineland citizen, John Gutenberg, who apparently invented the printing of books by means of leaden types. For as a result of that invention we have had innumerable exhibitions on this five-hundredth anniversary, accompanied by catalogues, miscellaneous publications, and several important books. Not the least interesting of the exhibitions was that of the Ann-mary Brown Memorial in Providence which featured the earliest printed versions of the Gutenberg claim to the invention. These early legends (the most credible being that of Ulric Zell of Cologne in 1499) are not authenticated; they can hardly be said to be adequate proof of anything but tradition.

The first original evidence of Gutenberg's activity in what is assumed to be printing was brought forward in 1760 by a Strassburg historian, Johannes Daniel Schoepflin, who had found three books in the city archives which gave some of the details of a law suit in which Gutenberg—and not for the only time!—figured. Like many an inventor, Gutenberg was perennially in need of money, and when a partner, Andrew Dritzehen, died, his heirs had to sue for an accounting. There was a cloud of witnesses, the testimony of many being included in the records. Schoepflin copied the records, and published them together with a Latin version of the Alsatian dialect in which they had been given. Unfortunately these documents have now disappeared—partly burned up in a bonfire celebrating the French Revolution in 1793, and partly when the city was besieged in 1870. Schoepflin had, however, preserved the wording in his book of 1760, reprinted by Nichols in 1938 in a very small edition.

These documents have not hitherto received full consideration and evaluation in any treatise in English, but Mr. Otto W. Fuhrmann of New York University has now done this in his "Gutenberg and the Strassburg Documents of 1439."* He has reprinted the text of the documents in the original Alsatian, as given by Schoepflin, together with Laborde's French rendition, and translations into modern English and modern German, in four parallel columns. Reproductions in facsimile are given of those portions of the manuscripts which were luckily

traced before their final destruction. He has also added voluminous notes tending to clear up points rendered obscure by the archaic and hazy terminology of the original dialect. With a practical knowledge of printing (which many bibliographers lack) he has given a clear exposition of the primitive methods of type casting and printing, and provided some clear and simple pictures in an effort to reconstruct the appliances of the early printers. An extensive bibliography and an index complete the volumes—though the index might have been a little more ample.

The book has been printed at the Press of the Woolly Whale as a quarto of over 250 pages, in an edition of 660 copies. The work has been set in Mr. Rogers's fine "Centaur" type, and is a handsome piece of work: with the exception of the bibliography, which is a little too exuberantly set up. The book is a sound bit of practical and useful printing, preserving a nice balance between those qualities and good looks. It is good to see so scholarly a work given a becoming dress, more especially as the book is likely to be for many years the definitive treatment in English of the principal evidence we have of Gutenberg's activity at an important period of his life.

THE present anniversary year has brought out several other books, important if less exhaustive in any one phase of the subject. This year



Painting in the New York Public Library.

Gutenberg shows a page from his Bible to a patron.

Mr. George Parker Winship, long an acute student of the incunabula period, gave the sixth series of lectures in the Rosenbach Fellowship in Bibliography at the University of Pennsylvania. These lectures have now been published under the title of "Printing in the Fifteenth Century."* While following the conventional pattern in telling the story—"The Invention," "Printing in Germany," "Printing in Rome and Venice," "The Spread of Printing"—he reflects the newer approach to the whole matter by giving due emphasis to the commercial aspects of the early printers' work. If sometimes he tries to correct the sentimentality of some modern writers, his attitude has a salutary influence. It must be remembered that the Rhine Valley was one of the main trade routes of Europe, and the fifteenth century Germans a practical people. The book is good reading, lively—almost aggressive at times, but it is the work of a seasoned writer and teacher.

The Gutenberg invention is now so generally accepted that Professor Pierce Butler almost appears to play the part of Devil's Advocate in his "The Origin of Printing in Europe"† by placing rather more emphasis than usual on the preliminary stages in the development of type casting. It is becoming clear that the period of trial-and-error may have been more productive of small and in a sense experimental "job printing" than the effulgence of the great Bible and the Psalter have allowed us to see, and that Gutenberg may not have been the only worker who was endeavoring to find a means of writing artificially. Professor Butler suggests some surmises, and announces a few new facts which he promises to elaborate more fully later on; it may be that vexed relationships of Gutenberg, Coster of Haarlem, and Waldfoegel of Avignon will yet be cleared up.

In "Wings for Words"‡ the indefatigable Mr. Douglas C. McMurtrie has told the story of the life and work of Gutenberg for younger readers. The method is fiction, largely conversation, and the result is a highly diverting narrative. This method is dangerous, but Mr. McMurtrie is an experienced writer as well as having been a student of printing for many years. The book is illustrated with lively pictures by Mr. Edward A. Wilson, and end-paper pictures of Mainz as it may have been.

**Printing in the Fifteenth Century.* By George P. Winship. Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press. 1940.

†*The Origin of Printing in Europe.* By Pierce Butler. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1940. 12mo, 174 pages.

‡*Wings for Words.* By Douglas C. McMurtrie. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co. 1940. 4to, 176 pages.

**Gutenberg and the Strassburg Documents of 1439.* By Otto W. Fuhrmann. New York, Press of the Woolly Whale, 1940. 4to, 272 pages.