

## Liquid History

*SWEET THAMES RUN SOFTLY.*

Written and illustrated by Robert Gibbings. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1941. 230 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

WE all know the remark about the Thames being "liquid history"; in Mr. Gibbings's pleasurable drift downstream it is, however, natural history that he chiefly celebrates. We receive our first intimation that this will be so on the first page of the preface, when he describes the flat-bottomed boat, aptly named *The Willow*, which he built for his voyage, for he constructed it with lockers in which "a microscope and other bits of apparatus might be stored," to "make the journey more interesting." Accordingly the most curious and delightful facts of botany and zoölogy emerge. Did you know, for instance, that spiders thrill to music, limpets peregrinate at night, woodpeckers dislike the sun in their eyes while nesting, and lichen yields a rich purple dye? Did you ever know a mouse who trimmed an indiarubber? Could you write a couple of brilliant and entertaining pages on mud, or that "thick felt" we so unperceptively call by the blanket name of grass? Can you tell the time of day accurately by the behavior of flowers? Did a fish ever eat from your hand? Mr. Gibbings could give an affirmative answer to all those questions, while such matters as the pulse-rate of birds and the beauty of gravel are no secret to him.

Mr. Gibbings, whose engravings are



From "Thames Portrait," by E. Arnot Robinson (Macmillan).

The Thames at Cirencester

justly well known, is a lecturer at Reading University and has lived for fifteen years in the Thames valley. He begins his excursion at the proper place, the actual source of the river in the well near Cirencester, and from time to time he makes efforts to follow the river methodically downstream to London. But then some fish behave oddly with a piece of weed, or a snail breathes, or a shower falls, or a girl swims, and at once Mr. Gibbings is off in the paths of scientific or psychological speculation. He has a nice humor and a broadly based philosophy, feels the unity of all living things and rejoices that the non-human world is as yet unaffected by the human folly of war. His landscapes, whether in words or woodcuts, have not only charm but strength of line, which reveals his very accurate observation. Altogether this is a highly agreeable if discursive and rather unfocused book. Edmund Spenser would be pleased, I think, to know that his "Prothalamion" had provided its title.

*Phyllis Bentley, who has been in this country for some months, has now returned to England. She will resume her war work as well as her writing on her return.*

## ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Edwin Arlington Robinson.
2. Thomas Babington Macaulay.
3. Thomas Bailey Aldrich.
4. George Barr McCutcheon.
5. George Bernard Shaw.
6. James Branch Cabell.
7. Richard Brinsley Sheridan.
8. Thomas Buchanan Read.
9. Percy Bysshe Shelley.
10. Joel Chandler Harris.
11. Arthur Conan Doyle.
12. William Cullen Bryant.
13. Henry Cuyler Bunner.
14. Edward Everett Hale.
15. James Fenimore Cooper.
16. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
17. John Greenleaf Whittier.
18. Jean Jacques Rousseau.
19. Gilbert Keith Chesterton.
20. Samuel Langhorne Clemens.
21. Thomas Love Peacock.
22. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.
23. William Makepeace Thackeray.
24. Sarah Orne Jewett.
25. Albert Payson Terhune.
26. Franklin Pierce Adams.
27. Charles Rann Kennedy.
28. James Russell Lowell.
29. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.
30. William Schwenck Gilbert.
31. Henry Seidel Canby.
32. Irvin Shrewsbury Cobb.
33. Edna St. Vincent Millay.
34. Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
35. William Vaughn Moody.
36. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
37. Ralph Waldo Emerson.
38. Oliver Wendell Holmes.
39. Arthur Wing Pinero.
40. James Whitcomb Riley.

## City Transit

*FARES, PLEASE! From Horse-Cars to Streamliners.* By John Anderson Miller. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1941. 204 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROGER BURLINGAME

UNTIL now, whoever was interested in the history of city transit was obliged to dig the pieces out of a variety of dull treatises, old magazine articles, and technical books. With his new book: "Fares, Please!" John Anderson Miller has done this job for us and has produced, moreover, an entertaining picture against the background of more than a century of social change. Much of it is easily rememberable to many of us and hence nostalgic: we can feel again the rattle of the iron tired omnibus over the cobbles and smell the steamy heat of a coal-warmed street car on a wet morning. A little beyond any present memory is Broadway, New York, in the days when individually owned busses, fifteen seconds apart, raced with one another for passengers at the corners.

The cable car and the overhead and underground electric trolley, the now obsolescent "L," the subway, the inter-urban trolley systems, the forgotten "jitney," and, finally, the resurgent bus "rolling on rubber" follow each other rapidly in Mr. Anderson's pages but with no neglect of detail. Necessary technical description is quickly and adroitly handled and the author passes on to ticket collecting, snow-ploughs, emergency repairs, care of horses, cables, powerhouses; franchises, mergers, and the pressure of public opinion.

The reader who has taken city transit for granted as a dreary and commonplace business will find unexpected curiosities in this history. I had not known, for instance, that trolley-car funerals were once popular in Baltimore after a magnificent hearse-car was put into service there in 1900. When cable cars were running, small boys used to hitch their toy wagons to the cable and ride for blocks between the tracks. Transfer tickets once bore pictures of different types of passengers so that a smooth-shaven man could not use a transfer on which a whiskered picture was punched.

Mr. Anderson has used primary sources throughout. The book is packed with illustrations made from contemporary prints, drawings, diagrams, and photographs; they show transit development from Lausanne to Buenos Aires, from Paris to Honolulu and from 1827 to 1940.

# Between Wars

## PROBLEMS OF MODERN EUROPE.

By J. Hampden Jackson and Kerry Lee. *The Facts at a Glance*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941. 128 pp., with bibliography. \$1.75.

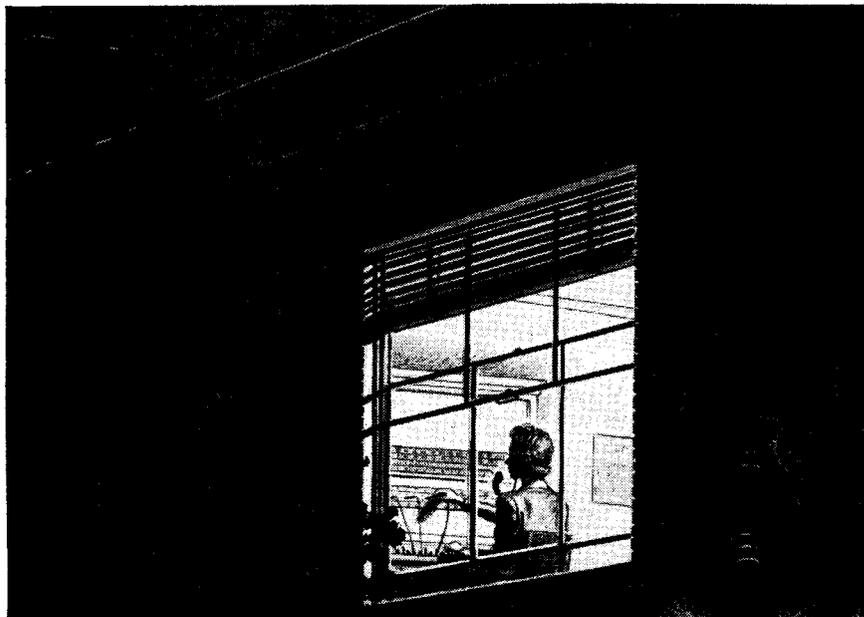
Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

**I**F there is any subject upon which we need illumination, it is "problems of modern Europe." Merely to blame everything on That Man in the Brown House is to miss the lessons of the twenty years between wars. These lessons are here discussed by the author of a standard work on Finland and an artist now in the R.A.F. Messrs. Jackson and Lee present the "facts at a glance" through stylized maps and pictorial statistics. Such problems as the resources of the great powers, capital movements, minorities, and colonies are all illustrated by rows of little ore cars, ships, cotton bales, cows, and money bags. Opposite each page of illustrations are a few brief paragraphs of explanatory text, simple, accurate, and remarkably impartial. After dealing with the basic problems, economic resources, and the search for security, the authors conclude that economic federation offers the most hope for the future.

Whether you like this book depends entirely upon whether you like your facts and interpretation straight or with pictograms. This reviewer prefers the former, but admits the utility of illustrated statistics in presenting purely factual problems. More abstract questions—like disarmament and sanctions—prove less tractable for the illustrator. The volume contains a wealth of useful figures for ready reference, but employs so many different symbols that the reader is frequently compelled to consult the introductory pages.

Despite the difficulty of criticizing compilations of statistics and rather overly-simplified text, three minor flaws require comment. In portraying the "peacetime cost of war," the authors unwisely chose 1938, a year which rearmament and diplomatic crisis had removed from the category of normal, peacetime periods. "Champions of Democracy" is perhaps a misnomer for a page which includes India and the British, Dutch, and Belgian colonies. A page illustrating "An International Cartel," finally, lists the United States and Canada under "U.S.A. Steel Cartel," producing thirty-four million tons in 1935 and the "European Steel Cartel," producing thirty-six million tons; it does not explain or compare these "cartels."

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## "I judge the telephone company by the people who work for it"

*A little while ago a Vermont newspaper editor, John Hooper, commented on the telephone company and its people. His words express so well the ideals toward which we are striving that we quote them here.*

**I**DON'T know how big the telephone company is, but it is big enough to exceed my mental grasp of business.

"But I don't find myself thinking of it as a business, even in my day-to-day contacts. Rather, my attention is on the voice that says, 'Number, please.' I find myself wondering if that voice is feeling as well as it always seems to, or if it feels just as hot and weary as I do, and would say so if it wasn't the kind of voice it is.

"The first time the business angle really struck home was when I read that my friend Carl had completed thirty years with the company.

"Now it happens that I know something of the details of those thirty years with the company, and I believe they are a credit both to Carl and to the big business for which he works.

"In 1907 Carl was a high school boy confronted with the need for earning money in his spare time. He happened to get a job as Saturday night operator in the telephone exchange. He worked at this job for three years and then entered the university.

"While in college he did some substituting at the exchange in his home town in vacations. After graduation, he was hired full time by the telephone

company, not in an 'executive' position which some folks think goes with a college diploma, but as a lineman.

"Within a year he was made wire chief of the district, a job which he held for the next ten years. He was then transferred to a larger city as manager of the office. Then he was promoted to sales manager of the division.

"A year later he was sent to another State, as district manager. In less than a year after this appointment, he was made manager for the entire State.

"Carl got where he is in a big business by intelligence and industry. And that is a story well known in the American pattern of life. But we shouldn't forget that a big business got Carl where he is because it also was intelligent and industrious.

"I don't know much about the telephone company as a business; I can only judge it by the people who work for it. Just where the dividing line is between a business and the people who work for it, I don't know. I don't think there is any line."

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