

Between Sicily and the Skagerrak



—Illustrations from the book.

El Greco's "St. Jerome as Penitent."

"The European Inheritance," edited by Sir Ernest Barker, Sir George Clark, and Paul Vaucher (Oxford University Press. 3 vols., 1,340 pp. \$16.80), is a synthesis of facts and interpretation by nine distinguished historians, British, French, Dutch, and American. Our reviewer, Paul Farmer, is the author of "The European World" and other works on modern Europe.

By Paul Farmer

ONE of the widespread superstitions of this credulous modern age is the notion that the cause of world peace is advanced whenever men of different nationalities meet face to face. Then, presumably, they argue out their differences and come to see the other's point of view. Thus we take it as a good omen, when the representatives of both sides in the cold war meet together in the United Nations, to hurl invective at one another and warn the world of the other side's evil purposes.

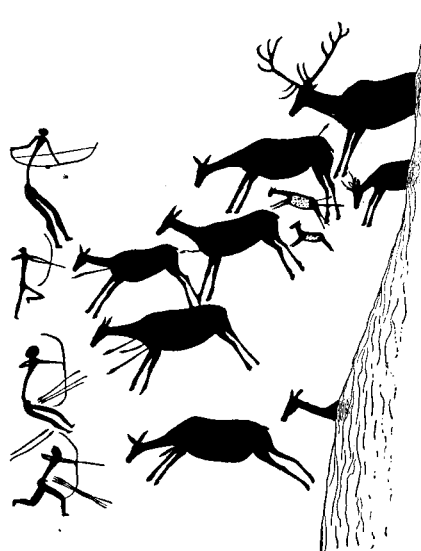
A similar superstition, much favored by academic people, holds that while no scholar can ever rise above his own patriotic bias, a committee comprising patriotic scholars from several different countries can produce a work free of nationalistic bias. This dauntless optimism has given rise in recent times to a number of enterprises for forming multi-national committees of historians, who are to write

books of history that will be acceptable to the peoples of all nations.

The fruit of one such endeavor is the three volumes which Oxford University Press offers under the title "The European Inheritance." The idea of this work was conceived in 1942, at a conference in London to which the British minister of education invited the ministers of education of eight of the Governments-in-exile then established in London. Subsequently a committee of editors was appointed, which entrusted the writing to nine distinguished historians. Five of these were British, two French, one Dutch, and one American.

The editors did much in advance to avert a clash of national passions. For instance, they omitted to invite a German historian to contribute, or a Slav. Thus they avoided some of the problems that might otherwise have arisen in tracing the course of the rancorous struggle between the Germans and the Slavs which raged all through the Middle Ages, as in the modern era. Likewise, the editors avoided the awkwardness that might have arisen had they asked an Asiatic to contribute his views of the European inheritance. And in choosing the man who would speak for the New World they showed tactful discretion in selecting an American who was born in Canada.

What we have here, in short, is a NATO history of Europe. And it's a good one. The chapters on ancient history are especially commendable.



Late Paleolithic or Neolithic painting from Rock Shelter in Southeast Spain.

To be sure, the story becomes a little disappointing as the narrative comes down to modern times, and the conclusion leaves much to be desired. But this is not wholly the fault of the authors. The three volumes can be warmly recommended to the general reader who wishes to add to his library a work which presents—in reasonable compass and readable form—a history of Europe that is based on sound scholarship and conforming to the biases common to the Anglo-American peoples and some of their allies.

THIS does not mean that the American reader will not notice a bias which is not quite his own. For the authors write as Europeans, conscious that Western Europe is now on the defensive, fearful that its age of greatness may be nearing its close. The Slavs, Sir Ernest Barker notes in the epilogue, are presently showing signs that they may have a larger role in the future than in the past. America, too, is challenging Europe's old pre-eminence, and some of the authors are not pleased with the thought. "The discovery of America was one of the greatest moments in the history of the human race," G. N. Clark observes. "But after it," he continues wryly, "one disappointment followed another."

Yet after reading these three volumes even the most enthusiastic of American patriots must harbor the hope that Europe may yet find new sources of vigor and may add still more to her patrimony before passing it on to her heirs.

This reviewer, who in his time has labored to solve one or two of the minor riddles of history, can not close these remarks without a salute to the author of the chapter on the Roman Empire. When he came to grips with one of the innumerable historical problems that defy solution—it happens to have been the question of why so unpromising a young man as Octavian was transmuted into so capable an emperor as Augustus—he closes the discussion with the simple remark: "There is no worthwhile explanation."

The writing of history will make no further progress until many more scholars learn to follow this humble and courageous example.

Sinful Holy Wars

"A History of the Crusades," by Steven Runciman (Cambridge University Press, 3 vols., 1430 pp. \$17.50), offers a detailed new account and interpretation of the vast movement that brought the East and West into contact and collision between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Professor Richard A. Newhall of Williams College, who reviews it here, is the author of "The Crusades," and other works.

By Richard A. Newhall

STEVEN RUNCIMAN'S "History of the Crusades" is a timely work, written by a scholar for general readers with enough intellectual tenacity to read three volumes. It is an epic story, well told but not over-dramatized, from which Americans can learn much. Crusading, in name, is part of American life. American attention is increasingly directed towards the Near East. More understanding of Asiatic history with respect to East-West relationships is needed. This work treats the Crusades as part of Near Eastern history. The emphasis is upon the Byzantine Empire, and the basic theme is that the welfare of Christendom depended on that empire's welfare. The political relations between Byzantines and Crusaders, and between both of them and the local Asiatic rulers on their borders and in Egypt provides most of the story, except when the impact upon Western Asia of events farther east makes additional complications.

Readers who think in terms of

numbered erusades may have to re-adjust their ideas. The First Crusade is unique. It merits a volume to itself because it set the basic pattern. Its surprising success created the situation from which later crusading developed. But from the start Mr. Runciman relates this expedition and the principalities it set up to the welter of West Asiatic politics. Such an approach requires a detailed story of Turkish, Armenian, and Egyptian dynastic affairs. This will introduce the reader to many unfamiliar names.

If this seems confusing it should not excite criticism. The situation was confused and remained so for two centuries. The author is merely emphasizing the significant fact that the Crusaders injected themselves into a much divided area during a time of troubles. They become part, but not major part, of the confusion. They set up intrusive, aggressive, alien states, hostile in principle to the neighboring Moslems. But for the latter these were "a festering sore" rather than a serious menace. The kaleidoscopic interplay of local political forces in the Near East preserved a precarious balance of power. In maintaining this balance the Byzantine Empire played an essential role. The Crusader states depended for their existence upon that balance. The Byzantines realized this. So did some of the Crusader princes in Syria. But the ardent soldiers of the Cross did not, nor did the leaders of Western Christendom.

IN OUR present time of troubles we recognize that the viability of small, new states is uncertain. The sentimental ideal of capturing and protect-

ing the Holy Sepulchre was the purpose of crusading. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was the protector. It was a state of doubtful viability. Inadequate manpower made it dependent upon continuous reinforcement from the West. But Westerners, stimulated temporarily by warlike piety, expected to return home after visiting the shrines, and insisted, while in the Holy Land, on fighting infidels no matter what the political situation might be. Often the ones who stayed were unscrupulous, greedy adventurers, younger sons with poor prospects at home, who came to the frontier to seek their fortunes. Their behavior suggests Pizarro's conquistadores. Their activities remind one of fourteenth-century Italian despots. From this group emerged leaders whose capacities varied from realistic statesmanship to frivolous irresponsibility. In addition the Latin Kingdom suffered from "the cruel prank of nature that makes baby girls tougher than their brothers." The problems presented to an exposed, remote, feudal community by frequent female successions and the search for adequate male consorts have the fantastic features of a Verdi opera. To all this the Assassins added a touch of terrorism.

Mr. Runciman is sure to dissipate any romantic notions the reader may have, and who will have guessed even before he gets to "The Summing-Up" at the end that this is an indictment. "There was so much courage and so little honor, so much devotion and so little understanding. High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost." Mr. Runciman regards the Crusades as disastrous failures, tragically harmful to Christendom and Western civilization. The facts support his verdict.



Templar Knights fighting the Saracens—"tragically harmful to Christendom and Western civilization."

—From "A History of the Crusades."