

Archeologist on an Oriental Journey

On Ancient Central Asian Tracks, by Sir Aurel Stein (Pantheon. 290 pp. \$5.95), contains portions of the records of four expeditions by the archeologist-geologist-geographer who died in 1943. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas's books include "Beyond the High Himalayas" and "West of the Indies."

By WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS

THERE have been four distinguished travelers in the heart of Central Asia: Marco Polo, Hsuan-tsang (the Chinese Buddhist), Sven Hedin, and Aurel Stein. Stein, who died in Kabul in 1943, was the Britisher who brought distinction to archeological studies of the area beginning about the turn of the century. He was trained in Oriental languages at Budapest and Oxford; he taught at Lahore (Pakistan), and was a member of the Indian Archeological Society. In between he produced an outpouring of scholarly writings, including some in Sanskrit. The present volume contains portions of his accounts of four Central Asian expeditions, all published before but now available for the first time in compact size for the average reader, and edited by Jeannette Mirsky, who adds an interesting introduction.

The book is timely in a historic sense, for it is about an area now under new strategic stresses and strains as a result of Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian relations. The book throws no light on the present conflicts, but it does put them in their historic setting, and anyone who wants to understand today's crises will profit greatly from this volume.

The territory of Central Asia is bounded by Russia on the northwest, Mongolia on the northeast, China on the east, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India on the west, and Tibet on the south. It has in its central portion the Taklamakan desert, and is dotted on its perimeter by a series of oases. Part of it appears today on maps as Russian Turkistan but most of it is commonly known as Chinese Turkestan, and is closed to foreigners, even those who recognize the Peking regime. What transpires there is, accordingly, a well-kept secret. But that it played an important role in Peking's recent conquest of Tibet is certain.

Central Asia has for centuries been a crossroads. Aurel Stein's journeys and



—From the book.

Painted clay figure of lady rider, from the tomb of Astana cemetery, Turfau.

diggings there determined definite dates for the various tides of conquest and defeat.

When China was weak and Tibet strong, the Tibetans moved north and dispossessed the Chinese, leaving their culture behind. The Mongols of Taxila (Pakistan) extended their rule into the country. The Turks—originally inhabitants of Mongolia—migrated south into these basins and became allies of various forces against the Chinese. The Huns of the north, and the Mongols, too, swept down over the mountain passes, raiding the fertile oases. The prizes were not merely the resources and fruits of the oases, but command over the caravan route as well.

IT was by this route that the ancient Silk Road connected Cathay and Europe. Marco Polo traveled it when the Mongols were in control. But before them the Chinese long held undisputed rule over it, and used it to exploit their silk monopoly. The Portuguese sea routes lessened its strategic value, but it maintained its importance to trade down through the nineteenth century.

Aurel Stein's journeys partly involved geography: locating old trade routes, finding the actual sites of cities described by Marco Polo and others, and tracing the Chinese Wall (an extension

of the Great Wall) made of reeds and clay and manned by towers that guarded the desolate area for hundreds of miles. He also engaged in topographical or geodetic work (mapping unknown mountain ranges and computing the elevation of their peaks) and in geological research (tracing loess deposits, exploring glacial moraines, discovering ancient stream beds). But he was essentially concerned with archeology, learning from the debris of ancient sites the nature and dates of the civilizations that once flourished there.

HIS accounts are not dressed up with technical details nor are they filled with matters that concern only the experts. As a result, these edited chapters read like detective stories. There are the clues, the logical deductions, and the discoveries. Ancient civilizations come to life; the struggles and privations of early people are relived; the glory as well as the disgrace of old regimes is disclosed; human devotion, dedication, chicanery, covetousness, and greed parade through the pages. The writing shows an archeologist at his best; Aurel Stein brings the ancient days to life with a zest of which the historian is not capable, for Stein deals with personal discoveries while the historian is usually interpreting from second-hand accounts.

Stein walked most of the way on his journeys, scaling heights of 16,000 feet or more and trudging for days through sand. On one trip his horse reared and fell on him; for weeks he was carried by a horse litter. His journeys in the desert were made in large part during the winter, and water was carried in the form of ice. Freezing winds, rugged fare, difficult terrain, long-suffering marches—these are all in the background but not greatly emphasized. Some of the caravan men come alive, and there are poignant passages about his beloved camels. But only those who have seen the surrounding country can begin to appreciate the heroic deeds behind these accounts.

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The Muse Is Always Gay

By ROBERT PACK, of the Department of English, Middlebury College

THERE is a handy cliché that is used by numerous reviewers when beginning their little essays on new poetry volumes; it begins something like this: "In this dismal age, one writer stands out . . ." But it is delightful to note that the reviewers do not agree on who is that one writer, that lone light.

Perhaps because so many literary people today are really politicians at heart, it is fashionable for them to be depressed. They mistake the troubles of the world, our social distress (which is of course reflected in our art), with the work of art itself. One of the blessings of art has always been that it can behold the spectacle of evil as if it were a butterfly pinned beneath a glass. Yeats tells us: "All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay." The goal of the artist, unlike that of the prophet, is not merely to express what he believes or to portray what he foresees, but to give pleasure, to release the delight inherent in shaping some material (even his own pain) coherently and well. To be disgruntled, outraged, or sardonic are the postures that reviewers too easily assume, mostly for their own aggrandizement. One is always more prominent when attacking than when praising.

It seems to me that, in spite of the pronouncements, the battle-cries, and manifestoes, the new movements, the

liberating breaks from the past—in sum, normal literary to-do and controversy—American poetry is flourishing as well as it has in any period of our history. One can barely keep up with the excellent books that are being written. How much more relaxing it would be for the critic if there were only a handful of works worthy of admiration!

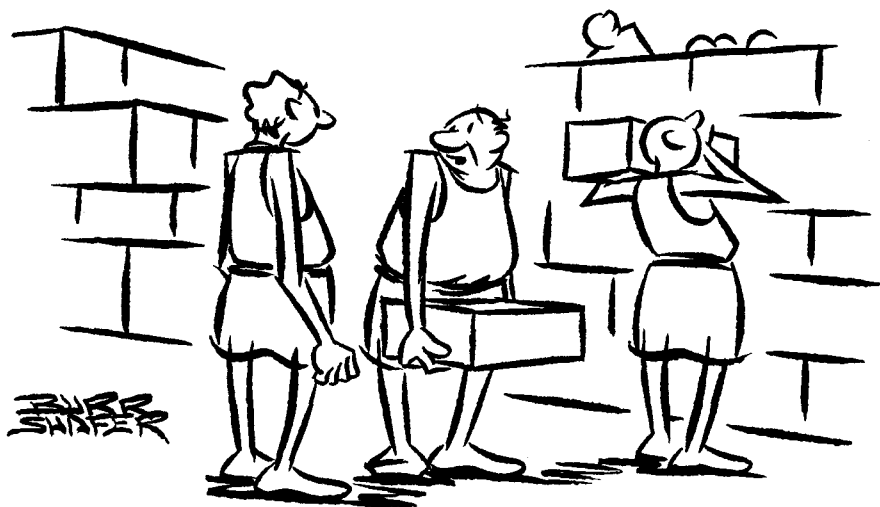
When a poet dies, the critics begin to discover what they have neglected. This, too, I suppose, is normal. If nothing else, we all still respect death. It is only a year, for example, since Theodore Roethke died, but in that short time he has rightfully been acclaimed as a great American poet. The speed of that recognition is important only as a reminder that more good humor, more acknowledged subjectivity, and, most of all, more love of poetry itself, can be helpful to a critic.

Galway Kinnell's first volume of poems, *What a Kingdom It Was*, published only four years ago, contained a long poem, "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ Into the New World," which in many ways replied to Eliot's wordly pessimism. At moments it clearly parodies Eliot: "Behind the Power Station on 14th, the held breath / Of light, as God is a held breath, withheld . . ." This poem, I believe, can stand comparison with the more famous "The Waste Land" in coherence, verbal richness, controlled evocation through images and mythic reference—in every way, in fact, but one: it is not an attempt

to break from a particular tradition. Thus it lacks the fascination of innovation, but this does not mean that Kinnell lacks a distinctive voice. The history of art is filled with both consolidators and innovators; surely Yeats is not inferior to Eliot, nor Mozart to Beethoven. And both Yeats and Mozart were individuals without shifting radically from the traditional means of their art. Yeats's leaning toward colloquial speech while holding to strict forms is at the very heart of the tradition of English poetry, from Wyatt through Wordsworth. I labor this point here because of the current infatuation with innovation, change, and revolution. Not all men need to slay their fathers in order to achieve manhood.

What matters finally is the integrity that guides the artist's use of his chosen means so that it reflects his personality and makes full use of his talent. Kinnell possesses this integrity. "The Avenue" has not gone unnoticed, but neither has it been acknowledged for the marvelous poem it is. Has the ordinary reader even heard of it? (Imagine if Tennyson were its author!) Let me quote a section here for the delight of it and because I would like to suggest that in his latest book Kinnell has tended to become more inward, mystical, and visionary:

First Sun Day of the year. Tonight,
When the sun will have turned from
the earth,
She will appear outside Hy's
Luncheonette,
The crone who sells the News and the
Mirror,
The old living thing on Avenue C,
Outdating much of its brick and
mortar.
If you ask for the News she gives you
the Mirror
And squints long at the nickel in her
hand
Despising it, perhaps, for being a
nickel,
And stuffs it in her apron pocket
And sucks her lips. Rain or stars, every
night
She is there, squatting on the orange
crate,
Issuing out only in darkness, like the
cucarachas
And strange nightmares in the
chambers overhead.
She can't tell one newspaper from
another,
She has forgotten how Nain her dead
husband looked.
She has forgotten her children's
whereabouts
Or how many there were, or what the
News
And Mirror tell about that we buy
them with nickels.
She is sure only of the look of a nickel
And that there is a Lord in the sky
overhead.
She dwells in a flesh that is of the Lord
And drifts out, therefore, only in
darkness



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