

A Hundred Boat Races

THE OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE BOAT RACE, 1929-1953, by R. D. Burnell; Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, English price 21/-. THE BOAT RACE, the Story of the First Hundred Races between Oxford and Cambridge, by Gordon Ross; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 16/-.

(Reviewed by A.M.)

EVERYBODY knows what you refer to when you mention "the Boat Race." This, the best known sporting event of its kind, owes its hold on the popular mind to several factors. The English revere such ancient institutions as Oxford and Cambridge; picked youth is engaged on a London course in a spectacular contest that calls for skill and the last reserve of strength and will; and though there has always been betting on the race, no breath of scandal has ever touched those most strictly amateur crews.

The hundredth race was rowed this year. R. D. Burnell, who takes the story up to 1953, is a distinguished oarsman, a "Blue" and son of a "Blue." He was captain of the English rowing team at the Empire Games in Auckland. He gives us a full, straightforward, authoritative, easily read narrative. Gordon Ross, a journalist, has prepared the official souvenir programmes for the

race, and watched both crews in preparation. He has a more popular approach and is wider in his range—bringing in such themes as diet and the controversy about the effect of rowing on the heart—but at times his divergences are irrelevant; he is inclined to emphasise the obvious, and his looseness of style is rather out of keeping with a university record, though that record is a sporting one.

There have been many changes in method and fortune, and a vast amount of excitement. We read of the introduction of outriggers and sliding seats; of sinkings, of processional finishes and agonisingly close ones; of the luck of the toss and vagaries of tide and weather and river craft; of spells of supremacy (Cambridge is nine up in the aggregate), of the choosing of crews and the policy of coaching; of great "strokes" and heredity in oarsmanship. A crew rarely rows again in its entirety, and a rowing "Blue" is awarded for participation in this one race only.

The much-discussed dead-heat of 1877, when many thought Oxford had

won, was a perfectly honest verdict, but the professional waterman who gave it sat in a skiff with no finishing posts to guide him. And it was not till he sought out the umpire, Chitty (afterwards Master of the Rolls) at the Law Courts, and delivered his decision, that the result was officially known. A leisurely age, indeed!

I have this criticism to offer, that though there is much talk of style and technical terms are used, there is no setting forth of the movements expected in a good oarsman (so far as different schools would agree), for the enlighten-

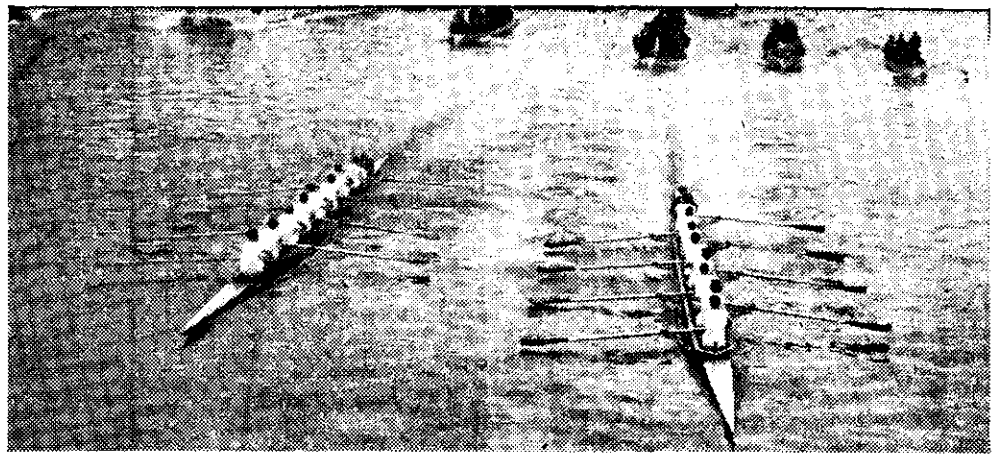
ment of those who, like myself, have only barged about in family boats.

The two books are copiously documented (Burnell gives over a hundred pages of records), admirably illustrated, and well printed. They will be frequently consulted for facts, as well as read for pleasure.

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THE HUNDREDTH BOAT RACE—Oxford (right) won by 4½ lengths

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