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BOOKS

The Adornments of History

A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLES, VOL. II, THE NEW WORLD, by Winston Churchill; Cassell and Co., English price 30/-.

(Reviewed by R. M. Burdon)

THE second volume of this history, entitled *The New World*, takes up the tale from the beginning of Henry VII's reign and ends with the revolution of 1688. The age was one of splendid achievement in art and science, and Sir Winston's concentration on politics pure and simple is more remarkable than when he wrote of a less civilised period. Edmund Spenser is mentioned once; Shakespeare and Newton not at all; nor is there any allusion to the Royal Society, the founding of which was surely a landmark of some significance. The translation of the Bible in James I's reign is hailed as an event of supreme importance; the scholars who carried out the work, "mostly unknown and unremembered," are given credit for having "forged an enduring link, literary and religious, between the English-speaking peoples of the world"; but on the whole, Sir Winston rarely departs from material affairs.



This, then, is essentially a political history, written by a professional who cannot be expected to observe the strict impartiality of one who has held aloof from political conflict. As his narrative gradually reaches out towards the present, with documentary sources becoming ever more copious, and at the same time more contradictory, Sir Winston grows more inclined to take sides and show preferences. In the civil war his sympathies lie, like those of his cavalier ancestor, Winston Churchill the Dorsetshire squire, with the royalists. The period of personal rule by Charles I is shown as a despotism so benevolent that it is hard to see it as the cause of such disastrous results. Accepting the fact that most Englishmen regarded monarchy as an institution inviolable and sanctified by tradition, one may readily comprehend that "Deep in the nature of the men who had broken the King's power was the conviction that law in his name was the sole foundation on which they could build"; but is it really justifiable to describe Charles I at the time of his execution as "a King who . . . represented the will and the traditions of almost the whole British nation"?

Two footnotes draw attention to the fact that this book was written in 1938-39 when the author, presumably, was in no mood to appreciate dictators, either ancient or modern. Conceivably enough the time and circumstance conspired to implant in his mind a strong prejudice against Oliver Cromwell, who introduced a system of government described here as "a brew of hot gospel and cold steel." The Lord Protector's virtues are not concealed, but the failure of his tyranny is emphasised, and his character denigrated by mention of his less endearing habits, notably that of associating the name of the deity with his own more sanguinary exploits. Reputations lie at the mercy of a writer whose character sketches are as vivid as

though drawn of some personal acquaintance. James I "came to England with a closed mind and a weakness for lecturing" is a sentence that might have been written soon after release from the company of that tedious monarch.

What I should call the adornments of history are no less plentiful in this than in the first volume. Mary, Queen of Scots, goes to her doom with dignity and courage, superbly arrayed for the final scene, but "In death the majestic illusion was shattered. The head of an ageing woman with false hair was held up by the executioner." In a state of painful indecision Henry VIII wrestles with the problem whether it would be better to appear bearded or clean-shaven at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Sir Winston has seldom been surpassed in the art of presenting history as a tale of thrilling adventure without loss of status as a serious historian. His ornamental passages are scintillating but never garish. Scholarly persons may find his anecdotal interludes superfluous, but I doubt whether any objections on this score will retard sales of *The New World*.

MUSIC FOR THE MILLION

THE FABULOUS PHONOGRAPH, by Roland Gelatt; Cassell, English price 21/-.

IT is seldom a reviewer's privilege to say of a book, "This stands alone in its field," but *The Fabulous Phonograph* is, surprisingly, the first comprehensive history of this scientific, industrial and musical phenomenon to be undertaken. As one would expect, it is written by an enthusiastic scholar, but the author's humour and flair for feature reporting should make it of outstanding interest to the general reader.

The story of the gramophone, from tin foil to hi-fi—its tortuous legal battles, mergers, business wars, booms and busts—is like a pocket history of our age.

(continued on next page)



Hey bop a rebop
Hey bop a rebop
Hey bop a rebop

From "Chips Off a Shoulder," by Sprod (Max Reinhardt)

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 22, 1957.