

TRADITIONS AND MEN

ENGLAND'S PRECEDENCE, by William McElwee; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 21/-.

WILLIAM McELWEE is an historian with a good professional record, and he knows his way around effectively among the sources of 17th century British history. This book, however, is professedly based on other men's research, and aims to tell coherently of a crucial period which is now so set about with excellent books that the shape of the whole has become obscured. The subject matter is "the most important achievement in all English history," namely, "the establishment of a workable system of representative government, and of the essential political freedoms." The narrative is basically personal, and deals with men, not with trends. It presents a lively pageant of understandable individuals whose calculations, good sense, passions and mistakes are set forth in deft and vigorous strokes. Traditions and men are shrewdly re-assessed, and there are clues to deeper interpretations.

If there is a criticism, it is that Mr McElwee has not dug sufficiently into the gaps left by his great predecessors, nor, perhaps, fully incorporated the results of some recent research into social and economic trends. One looks in vain for a firm explanation of why the fenland should suddenly sprout invincible soldiers, and of how it was that King Pym could suddenly arouse the frightening Frankenstein of a London mob howling for blood at the word of command. Nor are the foundations explored of that solid social structure that could endure a century of civil strife and yet remain stable through the storms of 18th century controversy. Yet what remains is a brave and important story, well worth a fresh and forthright retelling.

—F. L. W. Wood

ENTHUSIASTIC AMATEUR

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIER—a Life of Sabine Baring-Gould, by W. E. Purcell; Longmans, Green and Co., English price 21/-.

IF a writer deliberately embroiders his tales to entertain his readers, and invents incidents to fill out his archaeological records, does he forfeit his right to be regarded as reliable by succeeding generations? If, moreover, his novels owe so much to the styles of contemporary authors that they could be out of character with his own activities as a minister of the Gospel, and if his writings are so prolific that a starry-eyed admirer could ask whether he were the good man of his name who wrote such beautiful sermons or the other, learned, man of the same name who wrote novels, is it strange that he is known thirty years after his death only by the hymns he composed, and they not of the highest order?

Sabine Baring-Gould appears from William Purcell's biography as a man of the widest interests. A churchman moved by the full impact of the Tractarian movement in the Church of England, he was both squire (by inheritance) and parson (by presentation) of the isolated Dartmoor village of Lew Trenchard. There he was able to indulge his interest in all things antique, and write voluminous studies on archaeology, hagiology, folk song and story, as well as a shelf-full of novels, and innumerable books and pamphlets on Church doctrine and practice. He sought no limelight of literary parties, he replied to no criticism of his specialities. Yet for several decades he

had a reading public such that J. M. Barrie could place him "among the first 10 contemporary novelists."

He lived in his day, he wrote for his day. He pioneered the collection of folk song of England and the survey of his native Dartmoor, he was a populariser of Anglo-Catholicism, as well as a gifted preacher and loved pastor. His fault was that he was an enthusiastic amateur rather than a student, a journalist rather than a writer. He edited earthy folk songs mercilessly to make them acceptable for Victorian drawing-rooms. He invented saintly legends on the flimsiest of evidence. His work has always to be checked and suspected.

Yet the world would be the poorer without his "Uncle Tom Cobley (sic) and all," and his hymn, "Now the Day is Over," not to mention the confident, extroverted "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

—G.D.

MOUNTAINEERING DIPLOMATS

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE SUN, by Douglas Busk; Max Parrish, English price 25/-.
AN ARTIST AMONG MOUNTAINS, by Victor Coverley-Price; Robert Hale Ltd., English price 21/-.

BOTH of these authors have roamed over mountains in the course of leave from their duties as diplomats. Ambassador Donald Busk is an enterprising mountaineer as well as a fine photographer. He is also a perceptive traveller and good narrator. His tales of unfinished journeys in Ethiopia and the Ruwenzori are as interesting for their historical background as for their action and humour. He records native customs vividly. His passion for mountaineering spurs him to excellent chapters about "The Mountains of the Moon," as the Ruwenzori group was called, till their existence was proved by Stanley's party in 1888. Dense jungle and stormy weather were their natural defences; indeed, one explorer of Ruwenzori had only one fine day in six expeditions. Busk had better luck on his first trip, with memorable results for the climbing and photographic ambitions of the expedition. The illustrations to his book are outstanding. Colour as well as black and white shots are worthy of the text.

The art of Mr Coverley-Price is familiar to readers of the London Sphere. His many illustrations are all reproduced in monochrome. They are topographically accurate, but aesthetically dull. His wide experience embraces many countries: Britain, Europe, North, Central and South America, Japan, and South Africa. His writing, like his pictures, lacks sparkle and depth. His travels emerge merely as personal gossip. Perhaps the author should have concentrated on less variety and more detail, and the impression of flitting would have given way to appreciation. His adventures in the Amazon, for instance, do not receive the narrative of an articulate traveller. He has enjoyed himself, but may not give vicarious enjoyment to his readers.

—John Pascoe

CLOSE TO THE TARGET

A SHIP OF GLASS, by John Coates; Victor Gollancz, English price 15/-.
SO HELP ME GOD, by Felix Jackson; Cassell, English price 16/-.
STAY THE EXECUTION, by Daniel Nash; Jonathan Cape, English price 15/-.
A TALE OF THREE PLACES, by Edgar Mittelholzer; Secker and Warburg, English price 18/-.

IN Greece, during an earthquake, Nicholas Hearne behaved very well; indeed, he was rather heroic. It was a moment in which he found for himself a full stature; and Anna was won by the

(continued on next page)



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