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Mr. Mencken dates his discovery of the intoxicating power of letters from the reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. *Happy Days* is not to be compared with the greatest of books about a boy, the greatest glory of American literature, but it has in it some of the golden liquor that overflows from *Huckleberry Finn*.

D. W. BROGAN.

Close-Ups of Sculpture

The Sculptures of Michelangelo. (Allen and Unwin. 10s. 6d.)
Roman Portraits. (Allen and Unwin. 10s. 6d.)

THESE are the two latest additions to the Phaidon Series: as usual, very good value. Each has about 150 illustrations, most of them full-page and all of them from expert photographs. Both are tactfully edited, with very little introductory matter, and that to the point. But the Michelangelo was an unwise choice. Detail follows splendid detail in tireless procession, until the eye stonewalls these areas of carefully-disposed light and shade presented in this seductive gravure. The photographs attempt to dissect a giant. To keep any sense of scale at all you must refer, first, to one of the details, next to the full-length view of the sculpture on a previous page and then to the note of its dimensions, in inches, in the introductory text. After this, turn back to the detail, and if you are not absorbed in the unnatural drama of it for its own sake you will get a faint conception of a cubic foot or so of a Michelangelo sculpture, and a faint conception that Michelangelo was a great man. But when it is all finished it is like a lovely collection of programme notes on a super-classical symphony. The book will, as the saying is, give pleasure to thousands. But much of the pleasure will be of the kind derived from a performance of the "Art of Fugue" by the town band—pleasure at hearing a noise that you know is by a genius. One Alinari photograph of "David" in a *passé-partout* frame over the mantelpiece would give me more fun.

Roman Portraits is far better, because it has the virtue of any gallery of portraits, and the subjects of these are a wonderful collection. It was a good idea to put them together: the originals are scattered in Germany, France, England and Italy. The tortured features of horrifying "Immolators" and obscene-looking "Unknown Men" alternate with the symmetrical full-faces of some of the female portraits, personifying pride,

authority and abandon. Virtue is not entirely absent, but it did not interest these artists much. They are not dead types. Here are cunningly simplified portraits of people one meets in main streets and back streets today, men who work in the fields and factories, and dictators who sit in armoured trains—better than Low. There is merit in every one of these sculptures, and genius in most of them. The photographs are as good as could be; simple and not over-dramatic.

JOHN PIPER.

Regional England

England is a Village. By C. Henry Warren. (Eyre and Spottiswoode. 7s. 6d.)

We Like the Country. By Anthony Armstrong. (Collins. 7s. 6d.)

England Without End. By John R. Allan. (Methuen. 8s. 6d.)

Lancashire Folks. By Dora M. Broome. (Allen and Unwin. 5s.)

NONE of these books is another *England's Green and Pleasant Land*. Perhaps the time is not right, though clearly it ought to be, for someone who knows the country to restate the terms of Robertson-Scott's highly salutary attack on the wrongs, the bigotry and the muddle of English rural life. The preservationists, of whom Mr. C. Henry Warren is a fair example, are still with us. Whether it means progress or decay, Mr. Warren apparently hates change, and in *England is a Village*, a pleasant series of notes on life in an East Anglian village, the good fight is fought all over again: the fight for the muddled and the picturesque, the pretty but insanitary cottage, the dying craft, the Squire, the Church, the village pump, the oil-lamp, for the old and hearty, for honest country toil; the fight against council houses, the mechanised farm, an enlightened agricultural policy, tap-water, electric light, central schools, against "hygiene (that) is no wise substitute, in the long run, for hours spent in the open air." Out of the kind of English village he describes Mr. Warren rather proudly hopes that, after the war, "our phoenix strength shall rise." He neglects to state, except in airy phrases, exactly how this resurrection is to come about. He deplores the decay of English husbandry; yet his book contains no recipe for the reconstruction, economic or otherwise, of its ruined fabric. He shakes his head at the drift of workers from countryside to town, but is silent on the question of causes and solutions. He is very good at such sweeping general pronouncements as "I suppose we must make up our minds to accept a future in which the villagers will all speak the same standardised speech and in which the land is farmed by men trained in town laboratories," which is the kind of tear-shedding prophecy made again and again in the last twenty-five years and still, for obvious reasons, not fulfilled. He sees country life indeed as a pleasant muddle; he apparently prefers it that way and apparently wants to keep it that way: which is all very well for him, but whether the industry employing the largest number of workers in the country will derive much comfort from it is another matter.

Mr. Armstrong makes no mistake about phoenixes. He wants the best of two worlds. He likes the country, and I gather that he also likes London; he likes peace and quiet, but he is sensible enough to prefer, as Tchekov did, a decent lavatory, hot water, electric light, central heating. Like thousands of others, he took a cottage in Sussex, converted it, enlarged it, blessed it with civilised comforts, made a garden, and generally had a lot of fun. Not fancying himself, quite wisely, as a rural reformer, he puts down his impressions of house, garden, greenhouse, lilies, kittens, and leaves it at that. The result is a gossipy, friendly book which is not meant to be anything else and of which the unashamed moral is that country life is the finest life in the world if only you don't have to live perpetually on the margarine line.

Mr. Allan, armed with £30 in English currency, descends on us from across the Border: a Scot seeing England as "fertile, a damp, lush country of woods and meadows . . . rich for centuries in wool and corn"; the English as "intervening in other people's quarrels to their own advantage," as having "the easy mind which at its best makes the English so delightful a people and at the worst makes them so intolerable." Under the impression that "in England, it seems to me, you can do almost anything you like, provided you do it discreetly and do not try to change the order of society by force," he does a tour including Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Norfolk, Cambridge, London, the Royal Show, Dorset, the West. He notes Boston as being, quite rightly, "one of the pleasantest small towns in England"; he is struck dumb, as I confess to being myself, by the nobility of the Royal Crescent at Bath; he is enthusiastic about Dartington Hall and, unlike Mr. Warren, bases his hopes of rural regeneration on the proposition that "country life can imply the most civilised standards of work and creation." Like most of us, he wonders if England can survive; like any person of intelligence he asks himself, as Mr. E. M. Forster does, what of it is worth survival. He notes that "the Baldwins and Chamberlains and Horace Wilsons are not the whole of England;

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nor are Piccadilly Circus and Blackpool the crown of its civilisation," and looks forward to "a world where human life is of more importance than prosperity or profit." The book derives from such moments of prejudice and dissatisfaction a lively temper; it is caustic, witty, charming and tolerant. It arouses the interesting thought that, with invasions so popular, one from North of the Tweed might do us no harm at all.

Finally, if Mr. Warren seriously believes that we are about to enter on an age of standardised speech, he should take up *Lancashire Folks*. The greatest standardisers of the day, the Nazis, might waver before the prospect of trying to induce Mr. Warren's East Anglian labourers to talk the precise dialect spoken by the blunt, homely, kindly folk of Mrs. Broome's stories. These vigorous, pungent, humorous little sketches, so reminiscent of those of Mr. T. Thompson who introduces them, are a tiny but admirably authentic contribution to the regional literature in which we are so poor. H. E. BATES.

The Human Middle Ages

Europe's Apprenticeship. By G. G. Coulton. (Nelson. 8s. 6d.)

How pleasant it is to turn away from the present, if only for a moment, to consider with Dr. Coulton the not very pressing subject of mediaeval Latin. It might seem rather dry consolation—like offering someone who asked for bread a few bits of variegated stained glass. But not so—Dr. Coulton sees to that: he has the art of holding our interest even where—and it is a stern test—he repeats himself. Something of that is due no doubt to his general stance, as (I believe) the Americans say. He has the habit of asking questions which it does not seem to have occurred to others to ask (at any rate so insistently), and which when put turn out to have very illuminating, common-sense answers.

In this book, for example, he asks what were the facts about the clerical speaking and writing of Latin in the Middle Ages. He has certainly cleared my mind on the subject: I had hardly given it a thought before, but assumed, like most people, I suppose, a much wider knowledge of Latin among the clergy than turns out to have been the case. Dr. Coulton says: "The Church, in imposing upon Western Europe one single learned language, had as difficult a task as to impose clerical celibacy or to check clerical capitalism and luxury. The old Adam often proved unconquerable." Of course, when one comes to think

of it, it is only common sense: the number of people who were as fluent in Latin as in their own mother-tongue would be comparatively few, even in the Middle Ages. What one had hardly realised was the abysmal ignorance of the great bulk of the clergy, or at most the very elementary character of their knowledge of Latin. Nor is it surprising: when one thinks of these very ordinary folk, the wonder is that they ever know anything at all. No doubt it was due to the endless labour of the intelligent, the pressure of Popes and Councils and bishops, of the ecclesiastical machine with its schools and universities, its fulminations and disciplinary measures: far more wonderful that this ceaseless effort should be made. Dr. Coulton illustrates it, and proves his point with a wealth of examples (rather too many, in fact) not only from mediaeval literature, but bishops' registers, monastic chronicles and chartularies. Nothing escapes that vigilant eye, those relentless scissors: he has even got, alongside the statutes of great Councils, our poor little Tywardreath, an obscure Cornish priory next door to me.

This little book is a postscript to the great body of Dr. Coulton's work, springing from his view of the Middle Ages, that "past injustices have given place in our generation, here and there, to reactions which exaggerate almost equally in the favourable direction." He may be said to have won his battle against the Merry Middle Ages school of the blithe boys, Belloc and Chesterton. So much so that he can afford to be gracious and regard their reaction as "generous and healthy in the main." It is amusing to have to correct Dr. Coulton in a Protestant sense, when he accepts Leach's view that the "schools which Edward VI refounded . . . were few indeed compared to those which he destroyed: about thirty to four hundred." That I am sure, from my knowledge of the Edwardian Schools Roll for Cornwall, does the Edwardian government a great injustice: no reason to suppose that what they did for one county they withheld from others.

Dr. Coulton's last section consists of a selection of passages from mediaeval Latin authors with translation alongside. A delightful way of getting the hang of mediaeval Latin; for, as might be expected from the editor, they reveal the Middle Ages at their most human and life-like. A. L. ROWSE.

Mr. Wodehouse Carries On

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