



—From "Other People's Lives."

Britain from the Eolithic to Attlee

A HISTORY OF ENGLAND. By Goldwin Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 877 pp. \$6.75.

By CRANE BRINTON

HERE is a modern survey of British history from the eolithic to Clement Attlee and his colleagues. Professor Goldwin Smith is a young Canadian with a name familiar to all students of the Victorian Age. He has studied at Cornell, where his namesake had so distinguished and useful a career. His book is an admirable example of contemporary professional history, addressed no doubt basically to the college student who "takes" the history of Great Britain, but still a book which the general reader interested in getting a background in depth for the understanding of current international affairs can read with profit. It will be a most valuable "refresher" for all those whose notions of British history were formed a generation ago. A lot has happened to the writing as well as to the making of British history since the great wars. One suspects that the first Goldwin Smith would hardly here recognize the England he had read about in the pages of John Richard Green.

In form and in ground covered, this survey shows how complete has been the triumph of the "new history," now hardly touched with any sense of novelty. Professor Goldwin Smith covers everything—the chronological tale of wars and politics, the social and economic analysis, the literary and artistic culture, even the "national habits." The result, as has been pointed out so often, is certainly

a loss of sustained dramatic interest. You simply cannot do this sort of thing the way Parkman did his story of the rivalry between free Britain and enslaved France for the control of North America. You cannot do it for one thing because you no longer dare make such simplifications as "free" Britain and "enslaved" France; but, even though you were willing to simplify in the interests of drama, you just can't make economic and social history dramatic. There is no Mary, Queen of Scots, in the cotton business.

But there is a gain to compensate for the loss. History as Professor Goldwin Smith writes it has the scholarly virtues of fairness, rigorous checking of the facts, exclusion of the writer's own judgments of value. Professor Smith writes even of the present Labor Government without entirely giving away his own position. He is not, however, indignant and surprised at nationalization, which his namesake undoubtedly would have been. One suspects that he is just a mite left of center, but perhaps he really is above the combat, as Clio's household is supposed to be. Moreover, from history of this sort, if you do not get the excitement of plot, eloquence, and spectacle, you do get an awareness of the extreme complexity of a great state, of the interrelations of all men do and say, of the persistence, the inertia (in something like the physicist's sense of the term) that puts such definite limits on the policy of any state. You will tend to distrust any formula that presupposes a Britain totally different from the Britain whose long history is recorded here—such as a

Britain reconciled to the status of a second-rate power, a Britain immediately merged in a world-state, a Britain unanimously pro-American, indeed, and most unlikely of all, a Britain unanimous about anything.

Perhaps it is the accident of this repetition of the name of Goldwin Smith, but it is difficult to read this book without finding the old problem of historical relativity rather sharply put. For right at the very beginning of this book two of the facts about British history which the first Goldwin Smith and his colleagues took for granted are quite simply rejected. The Victorians almost to a man believed that Englishmen—in contrast to Welsh, Irish, and the other unfortunate Celts—were of German blood; they believed—though there was more dispute on this point, that those institutions of democratic self-government they were so proud of originated in the German forests, and were brought over to England with the Anglo-Saxons. The second Goldwin Smith leaves almost nothing of these beliefs. The Anglo-Saxons even in the East of England did not make *tabula rasa* of the natives, as we did later with our Atlantic Seaboard red Indians; at worst, they enslaved the natives, took on their women as concubines, and merely added a strain of German to blood already mixed since paleolithic times; as for the forest democracy of the Germans, that seems now to have no standing at all.

We cannot here go on down the ages in this comparison, which would be a most interesting task. Magna Charta, for instance, looks quite different in this book from the way it looked in Victorian books. But will a third Goldwin Smith in 2025 write a British history which contradicts this one? In some respects, yes. But there will be a solid residue that survives, for in some sense history is a cumulative study. The Anglo-Saxon myth, for instance, can hardly be revived, unless in the breakup of civilization the slow but real process of accumulated knowledge we call history is lost.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 822)

W. S. MAUGHAM:

A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

There is a nobility . . . which depends neither on culture nor breeding. . . . It may be that in the knowledge that man for all his weakness and sin is capable on occasion of such splendour of spirit, one may find some refuge from despair.

Fiction. *The novels reviewed this week are as far apart in theme and interest as their settings in England, Scotland, France, and Utah. In "The Peaceable Kingdom" Ardyth Kennelly writes tenderly and lyrically about her grandmother, a warm-hearted and irresistible Swede who discovered that one husband was not enough for two women, but who made her separate dwelling a place of delight and enchantment for the children. Marghanita Laski's "Little Boy Lost" is a fragrant story of a Frenchman's search at the end of the war for the son whom he had not seen since the day of his birth. David Walker's book, about a manhunt in the Scotch Highlands, is on a higher level than the usual escape and pursuit story. Elizabeth Goudge's countless admirers will find her eighteenth book, an historical novel of Devonshire in Napoleonic days, as satisfying as anything she has written, and the same praise can be given to P. G. Wodehouse's expert and pleasantly silly "The Mating Season."*

Life According to the Prophet Smith

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM. By Ardyth Kennelly. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 375 pp. \$3.

By DALE L. MORGAN

AMONG the reasons Ardyth Kennelly gives for having written "The Peaceable Kingdom" is that "like the poem says, when I am gone O who will remember the lady of the West Countree." It is certainly her maternal grandmother she bespeaks, and superbly Miss Kennelly has seen to it that the lady shall never be forgotten. The resourceful, warm-hearted, wonderfully good-humored, altogether irresistible woman who in this novel is called Linnea Ecklund overflows the pages of the book to fill our hearts. Tragedy indeed, had there lived no granddaughter to hold her in remembrance.

A book like "The Peaceable Kingdom" has its origin in cherished family memories, in proud silk dresses preserved in spicy chests in old attics, in well-built houses and well-kept graves. It has the unmistakable stamp of having been richly lived before ever a time came to put the living down on paper. But it takes Linnea's spiritual heir to know just how it all must have been and enable us to sit in the Ecklund kitchen drinking frag-

rant Swedish coffee with the comfortable assurance that the Lord never intended that the Word of Wisdom should apply to Swedes, savor with equal pleasure the exciting prospect of moving again, or run around the house in frantic haste to rescue Gertrude before she can fall after her new hat down the big hole in the backhouse. In five years I have not read a book with greater enjoyment, and the rest of my days I am going to have a fond place in my heart for the Linneas of "The Peaceable Kingdom."

The Linnea of the book was the second wife of Olaf Ecklund. Let no one think that she married in polygamy because of stern religious duty or because she had no other option. Not Linnea. Smack-dab, she fell in love with Olaf, the young tailor with the broad shoulders and deep voice who could sing like a bronze bell booming, dance a polka with the friskiness of a colt, and slide around a lady's waist an arm strong and warm. And though Linnea was not so pretty as the first wife, Sigrid, there was about her a kind of splendor that enchanted Olaf just as it will you and you and you; no wonder he was a fool about her.

As became a responsible young Mormon, Olaf tried his best to be

impartial with his wives. The trouble was, as Linnea reflected in her more objective moments, God or the Prophet Joseph Smith just didn't take human nature into account when he or they thought up the idea of plural marriage. Not women's human nature, anyway. One husband just couldn't be enough to go around.

Olaf's naive idea had been that his two wives would get along like sisters; he had imagined them "strolling with their arms around each other's waist, speaking in soft voices, perhaps even singing duets together." He ended by thanking the good Lord that they lived in different wards, attended different meeting houses, and had different friends. Linnea's view, as argued to another plural wife for whom polygamy was a special consecration akin to entering a nunnery, was, "Why it's just like marriage! There ain't nothing to be heartbroke about if all you got to contend with in this life is *polygamy!*" But sensible in this as in all else, she taught her children that times were changing; when her daughters should come of age, polygamy would not be good enough for them, let them remember that!

If this were just another book about the singularity of two women sharing one man in marriage, "The Peaceable Kingdom" would have no special claim to our time, for by now there have been enough of these and to spare. What makes Miss Kennelly's novel a thing of delight is the never-failing humanness of Linnea, her children, and her friends. They are your Aunt Jane, the kids you grew up with, the neighbors up and down the street and over on the next block. In the Ecklund home, peripatetic as it is, you may revisit your own past and are granted a prevision of your grandchildren's future, for the things Miss Kennelly writes about are timeless. And of course superbly quotable. No one who reads it can resist the temptation of reading aloud some of the passages that are sheer delight and which go on quoting themselves in your mind whether or not you are able to pass them on to an appreciative audience. Miss Kennelly, this is an extraordinarily fine job. If you have another such grandmother up your sleeve, let's hear about her.

