

REVIEWS

ROMAN SOCIETY IN GAUL IN THE MEROVINGIAN AGE. By SIR SAMUEL DILL. Macmillan, 1926. 8vo, pp. xiv, 566. 21s. net.

Not only specialized students of ancient history, but a wide circle of readers able to appreciate vivid descriptions of the manners of another age, have been grateful to Sir Samuel Dill for his two books on the social life of the middle and late Roman Empire. No one who had read them is likely to forget them ; the author's gift for painting picturesque and strongly characterized sketches of ancient social life has long given him a place by himself among historical writers ; it is not too much to say that one corner of the mantle of Gibbon rested upon him. When, after his lamented death, it was made known that he had left a third volume, half finished, one hoped for great things ; and these hopes have been more than realized.

The new volume has been edited by Professor C. B. Armstrong, with whom the author had discussed its arrangement and contents, and whom he had asked before his death to prepare the book for publication. It was a task involving much labour, and requiring, as is evident, tact and judgment ; the provision of notes and references to such a work is arduous, and the polishing of an unfinished manuscript by another hand is a task which no one would undertake except as a labour of love. Both tasks have been well done. It is true that there are still roughnesses of style, repetitions of incident, and here and there a judgment, an emphasis, or even a statement of fact which second thoughts might have altered ; but to have smoothed away all these things would have involved robbing the book of just that personal quality which makes it visibly the work of its author.

Of the three volumes, this last is perhaps the most interesting. The subject-matter of the other two is relatively familiar, and the problems with which they deal are relatively simple ; but with this book we plunge into the heart of the question—what process led from the world of the later Roman Empire to that of the Dark Ages ?

From a purely historical point of view, this problem is important just because it is a problem ; a question in which historians ought to be interested just because they do not know the answer. But there is a further reason why this problem is of special interest to the modern world. Of all past historical periods, the Roman Empire is that which most closely resembles our own ; and we are most of us aware that our civilization is exposed to forces which seem bent upon its destruction. Not to wonder what is going to become of us would be less than human ; and to a generation afflicted by this question there is no more valuable study than that of historical analogies and parallels. History never repeats itself ; but its processes may resemble one another so closely that, so long as we duly attend to the features peculiar to each, it is not impossible to argue from one to another, and use Antiquity as a lantern to explore Futurity.

The peculiar value of Sir Samuel Dill's book lies here. Political history in the traditional style is practically useless. It only tells us that the Roman political system collapsed and that the Merovingian system, since we are speaking of Gaul, took its place. Politically, there is no continuity ; there is only a clean cut ; and a clean cut is not history. When we turn to the structure of society, we get an entirely different result. In Merovingian Gaul we find two civilizations existing side by side, differentiated originally at every point ; by the time of Clovis, a certain assimilation has set in ; the older civilization has converted the newer to its own religion, but the distinction of race and social organization is still emphatically asserted. Indeed, the inferiority of the Roman to the Frank in the social scale of values is legally sanctioned. Yet, in spite of

ANTIQUITY

this, the Roman preserves his identity ; his social organization remains intact, and is able by degrees to impose itself on the conquerors to such an extent that from Teutonic Franks they end by becoming Frenchmen. Thus the Frankish invasion, though it swamps the structure of Romanized Gaul beneath a flood of Teutonism, does not disintegrate this structure ; it remains substantially intact, and bides its time to assert itself. This reading of the evidence is inevitable, granted the truth on which the author often insists, that in spite of upheavals, wars, the destruction of wealth, and the fall of ancient families, *the old Romano-Gaulish landed estate survived the storm, and pursued a peaceful existence throughout the period of transition.*

This is the heart of the problem. The survival of Roman tradition in Gaul, and its triumph over the Teutonic tradition politically superimposed upon it, was a function of the villa system, the landed estate which acted as the trustee for all the ideas of Roman civilization.

The English student has much to learn from this conception with regard to the history of his own country. In Britain, the opposite process took place. The Teutonic invader triumphed over the Roman tradition, not only politically but in language, in religion, and in economic and social organization. Why this happened in Britain, and not in Gaul, is an old problem ; a problem which has driven innumerable historians into positive misstatements of fact ; yet, in the light of the conception so clearly expounded in this book, a problem by no means insoluble.

One historian, misled by a hasty interpretation of Gildas and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, fancies that the Saxons blotted out the Romanized Britons by fire and sword. Another, realizing the sheer impossibility of such a military feat, boldly declares that the Saxon conquest never happened at all ; and that we are the Romanized Britons. The truth, as it appears to the present reviewer, is less exciting but more credible than either of these fancies.

The Romanization of Britain was a very real thing. Haverfield, who discovered it, may have exaggerated it in a few points of detail ; but it was a genuine discovery, not a mare's nest. What he did not sufficiently recognize was that it was skin-deep. It affected at first the tribal aristocracies ; and later the whole of that large middle class whose country houses we call Roman villas ; but it never struck its roots deeply into the masses of the population. In the country villages, and perhaps also in the mean streets of the towns, the only Romanization that took place was the acquisition of Roman pottery, coins, and such-like externals of civilization. And even in this restricted sphere, Romanization was far from complete. In countless out-of-the-way villages, it is probable that native fashions persisted unchanged. Thus, it is almost startling to learn that ancient British coins continued to be struck at Hengistbury down to the late second century. By the fourth century, Roman civilization in Britain, with all that it implied in the way of social, economic, political, religious, and linguistic habits, was universal in the upper and middle classes, but had left the lowest classes, and especially the country villages, all but untouched. Now this was exactly the same in Gaul. Sir Samuel Dill quotes more than one anecdote showing that the peasants in out-of-the-way places were in a state of savagery, that is, were not Romanized, by the sixth century. Thus we cannot argue that the failure of Roman civilization in Britain to conquer the Saxons was due to the fact of its being less wide-spread or less deeply rooted than in Gaul.

The clue to the difference seems to lie in the fact that the great disaster of 367, in which the whole country was over-run not by Saxons but the far more destructive Picts,

REVIEWS

involved a systematic destruction of villas. It has often been noticed that the life of a Romano-British villa normally goes down to this period and there ends abruptly. But the importance of this fact has, I think, never been observed. With the destruction of the villas, Roman civilization in Britain was destroyed; for it was the civilization of a class, not that of a homogeneous social organism. The people who remained were significantly called by their conquerors not 'Romans,' as in Gaul, but merely 'Welsh.' The Celtic revival of which Haverfield wrote was not so much a revival of Celticism, as the survival of those lower classes which had never been at all deeply Romanized.

Thus the real destruction of Roman Britain, which was a social and economic affair, not a political, took place in 367; and nothing like that ever took place in Gaul. By the time the Imperial government abandoned Britain, there was nothing left worth keeping. Had the landed classes with their villa estates remained intact, Roman civilization would have survived the Roman evacuation in Britain as it did in Gaul, to set its mark on Anglo-Saxon society. Whether that would have been a good thing or a bad thing for the world's happiness, is another matter. But if it was a good thing that Roman civilization, a romance tongue, and the Christian religion, survived in Gaul, it is worth our while to realize that the reason why these things survived was because the social class survived whose property they were.

R. G. COLLINGWOOD.

REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION OF THE "A" CEMETERY AT KISH, MESOPOTAMIA. By ERNEST MACKAY. Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropology Memoirs, Vol 1, no. 1. Chicago, 1925. pp. 61, and 20 plates.

The most dramatic sidelights on the life of vanished civilizations and peoples have often been afforded by a study of ancient graves; and recently discovered tombs of a Norse queen at Oseberg and of Tutankhamen in Egypt are obvious instances in point. For the serious archaeologist the study of cemeteries has another advantage: the funeral gifts interred with a single corpse present the most perfect example of a "closed find"—a group of objects unmistakably in use together at the same epoch. The chronology of predynastic Egypt is based entirely upon a comparison of various types of objects found in association in the many cemeteries excavated in the Nile valley.

Mesopotamia has been sadly neglected in this respect. The earlier excavators were concerned primarily with objects of artistic or epigraphic interest and were apparently entirely unconscious of the meaning of a "closed find." The excavations of the Germans at Assur and of the British Museum at Eridu and Ur marked the first steps towards more scientific methods, but to Mr Mackay of the Oxford and Field Museum Joint Expedition, falls the honour of publishing the first detailed account of a necropolis explored on modern lines.

The thirty-eight tomb groups that he describes naturally do not suffice for the establishment of a comprehensive system of sequence dating such as Sir Flinders Petrie has worked out for Egypt, but their furniture throws a new light on the more every-day arts and crafts of ancient Babylonia and thus provides terms of comparison with barbarous lands to the north and east. The pots, weapons, and ornaments of the common people in Mesopotamia were previously scarcely known. In view of the large claims for Egyptian influence that are being made to-day on the strength of comparisons between grave-goods from the Nile valley and other regions, material of a like order was badly needed for the kindred area of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.