

Last Roundup

LAST MAN AROUND THE WORLD.
By Stephen Longstreet. New York:
Random House. 1941. 368 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LINTON WELLS

“JUST before the curtain went down” on what we used to think of as Civilization, that master word-craftsman, Stephen Longstreet, circumnavigated the globe and became the “Last Man around the World,” as he calls his book.

Longstreet says modestly that “Last Man around the World” is no guide book, no history, no book of detailed economic charts. “It is one man’s picture of his world with the sketches of things seen and heard.” Actually, it is an infernally clever portrayal of peoples and places, exhilaratingly caustic and bluntly sagacious—gratifying proof of the wisdom of the author’s admitted policy of “drifting around without a guide book, talking to people and asking stupid questions,” then writing of what he has seen and heard and admitting that of which he is ignorant.

For the most part, Longstreet voyaged aboard a luxury liner during those halcyon pre-war months. He has seen fit to conceal the identity and actual course of the vessel, but from her he digressed into the hinterland of Europe, the Balkans and Near East, Africa, and Asia. The true names of his heterogeneous traveling companions are also concealed, manifestly with good reason.

There was, for instance his bibulous roommate, wealthy Big Boy, chronically afflicted with DT’s and incessantly in search of comely “tomatoes” to sample; there was an aggressive, acquisitive, soul-examining Pamela, unhappily retreating from marital memories; there was a lusty, Kansas-



—Sketch by the author.

born Duchess, “not a woman, but a gland.” Others were the erudite Proust’s Pal—an elderly Peter Arnoish elegant; the liner’s Captain, a “shy but very passionate man;” and divers other human oddments who “dined and drank and squabbled and got emotionally snarled up and saw sights and scraped up strange acquaintances and listened to strange tales in bars wherever they went.”

Among many other matters of more or less importance, Longstreet learned abroad that the fleas of Rumania “seem to hold the upper hand and abuse one’s confidence;” that “graft is not a habit but a tradition;” that “nepotism is a national sport and children are born with delinquent taxes; and that “the only trouble with Hawaii is the fact that it is so like the travel posters.”

The author took time out in China to become a war correspondent and his understandable reaction to Japanese aggression against China, carried on with hypocritical American aid, was:

“I think I shall study to become a hermit, or shake hands with a leper.”

China also provided Longstreet with gastronomic material for perhaps his most graphic descriptive writing, which I can attest is not exaggerated:

“New-born cage-bred mice are nude and pink. Before hot wine is drunk, they are dipped alive in batter, held by the tails and fried, then stirred in cold honey and popped into the mouth while one chews off the tail. Big Boy had six, but he had been drinking bowls of warm wine and thought they were radishes. He was still gregarious and friendly when he found out what he was chewing.”

“Last Man around the World” conceivably may be the last chronicle of its kind written, because this earth may never fully throw off the effects of the current war virus, so it represents a legacy by Stephen Longstreet which well deserves reading.

Linton Wells, foreign correspondent, news broadcaster, is the author of “Blood on the Moon.”

Be Focal

Writing with frigid insolence of modern architectural problems, a fellow hack claims that the architect must henceforth establish “a developmental ratio between the utilitarian and the æsthetic.” He forgets the great Corbusier’s hoarse cry at Passy in 1929:

“Resolve the dominant! Be focal! Fuse the nodal pentatonic line into an organic higher dynamism! Rhomboidalism is the enemy! Waiter! A crème de menthe!”

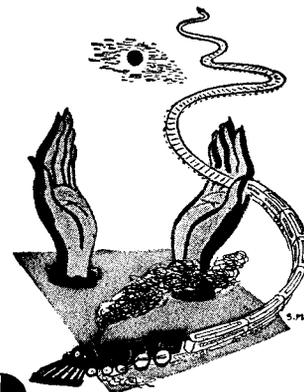
—News Chronicle, London.

Basic English Bible

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN BASIC ENGLISH. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1941. 548 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by KIRSOPP LAKE

IT has often been said that a committee cannot write English, and it has as often been replied that this is refuted by the King James version of the Bible which was the work of a committee. Nevertheless, the former statement is true, and the King James version is no exception, because the committee appointed by the King did little more than accept Tyndale’s version with a minimum of change, not always for the better. To illustrate the fact that it was not always for the better, the Book of the Psalms of David in the King James version should be compared with that in the Prayer book, which took the Psalms from the Great Bible of King Henry the Eighth, of blessed if matrimonial memory, and represents almost unchanged the version of Tyndale,—Coverdale—(Matthew). For instance, the Prayer book in Ps. 108, 28-30, says “So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble . . . he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be,”—which is lovely English, but the King James version says “unto their



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desired haven," which is miserable English.

Nevertheless, though the King James version owes little to the committee, and much to the genius of Tyndale, it is a superb monument of the language.

Attempts to improve it have been made in two directions. In the first place, recognizing that the Greek text from which it was made was in the main that of codex 2, a late and inferior manuscript at Basil, in 1881 a new committee was formed in order to correct mistakes in rendering, and to select the better readings. It was not a success, for in the first place though the members of the committee were great scholars, they were better at destroying the music than at improving the sense, and in the second place, they were pedantic rather than accurate in their insistence in always using the same English for the same Greek. Thus the revised version has never been a success.

A few years later began a series of efforts to put the Greek Testament into modern colloquial English. To my mind they were all horrible.

Now we have a different kind of translation—the Bible in basic English. I admit that I was prejudiced against it by a review in the *New Statesman*, which I now regard as

very unfair. I am not converted to the idea of basic English, but this volume seems to me to be a wonderfully good rendering. It is scholarly, and musical. Naturally, there are many places where I should enjoy a discussion with the editors, especially with Professor Hooke, with whom I think I had some dealings some thirty years ago. But in general I like the translation. I will only venture two queries. In Mark XIII the Greek *gregoreite* is translated "keep watch"? Yes: of course that is not wrong, but I suspect that

"keep awake" may be nearer the exact nuance of the word. Similarly in Cor. XIII *agape* is rendered "love." Certainly that is not wrong, but "love" has such a different meaning in modern speech, that I wonder if "kindness" would be possible.

If I had not seen it I could not have believed that it was possible to write such good English with the limited vocabulary which is the principle of basic English in which there are only 800 words. My compliments to the editors.

TRADE WINDS

AS the nights become longer we are looking forward eagerly to the publication, as part of the "Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies," No. 33 [*sic*], of "The Art of Courtly Love," by Andreas Capellanus, with introduction, translation, and notes by John Jay Parry. It is published, of course, by the Columbia University Press. Publication date is Sept. 29—just two days after a first quarter moon.

And a serious book it is. In C. S. Lewis's "The Allegory of Love" (Oxford University Press), are these words: "French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched, and they erected impassable barriers between us and the classical past or the oriental present. Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature."

"That 'romantic species of passion' is what scholars know of as 'courtly love.' Courtly love, to be brief and to the point, was predicated upon the assumption that love between husband and wife was impossible and could be experienced only between a man and another man's wife," continue the publishers. As we note some of the chapter headings we are intrigued: such come-ons as "If One of the Lovers is Unfaithful to the Other," "Where Love Gets Its Name," "The Love of Peasants," and "Between What Persons Love May Exist."

Some of the easiest jobs we know of are those held by judges for the Boston Herald Book Fair, to be held October 21-26. Their collective job will be to select "The 1000 Best Books of the Year," which will be placed on exhibition. Choosing one thousand of the "best books" is a cinch; this number

comprises from fifteen to twenty per cent of the entire book publishing output of all publishers for the year 1941. And that includes text-books, juveniles, and reprints.

News of this sort is warm and human. It implies that practically all publishers and authors of trade books will be represented in the "best book field." We are trying hard to guess just what book or books of the year will be omitted. And while we're in this mood, we wonder just how effective this "best-book business" really is. Do they really stimulate interest and sales? At any rate, we hope so. Think for a moment—what was the Pulitzer prize book for fiction for 1940? What was the "best book" chosen in the non-fiction class by The American Booksellers Association for 1940? Is this book still in stock in many bookstores?

All these questions must be considered against the background and circumstances in which books are published. Theoretically, all books published by reputable publishers are good books. Authors work diligently and sincerely in the belief that they are writing sound, intelligent material. Someone, somewhere, is moved with pleasurable excitement over his book. That is the compensation for a writer who has worked, perhaps for years, over a manuscript but who is given the rapid disregard by professional critics.

What we would like to see is some form of permanent exhibition of all books of all publishers housed under one roof, so that those interested in the literature of the United States could see what is being produced. The two hundred or so American book publishers will find that the cost of maintaining such an exciting and interesting display of their products would cost them less than five dollars a month. *Trade Winds* has the figures. And what a kick booklovers would get out of it.

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