

## Wanderings in the Watery Part of History

*“The Ancient Mariners: Seafarers and Sea Fighters of the Mediterranean in Ancient Times,”* by **Lionel Casson** (Macmillan, 286 pp. \$5.95), fattens scholarship with the recent sea diggings of skin divers to recreate a centuries-old civilization. **Walter Magnes Teller**, who cheers the achievement, is the author of *“The Voyages of Joshua Slocum.”*

By Walter Magnes Teller

**M**ARITIME bygones from the invention of sail—which Lionel Casson estimates as c. 3500 B.C.—to the time when helmsmen learned to steer by compass and with rudder—about 1200 A.D.—is the main concern of *“The Ancient Mariners.”* And I think the story, as the author pleasantly calls it, pretty well meets Morris Cohen’s ideal of history: “an imaginative reconstruction of the past which is scientific in its determinations and artistic in its formulations.”

In shaping his course through the nautical past, Mr. Casson, a professor of classics at New York University, does first-rate detective work. His account is based on the findings of sea-bounded archeology—sea diggings, he calls it—wreck-raising, the examination of antique wreckages first dredged up by Mediterranean sponge divers and more recently by shoals of skin divers. Thus his book (which he claims is first in the field) could not have been written much sooner. Naturally, he also draws information and makes his deductions from writings on clay earlier exhumed from the dry sands of Egypt and all manner of Eastern places. He has performed his research well, not only in libraries and museums but, thanks to a Guggenheim Foundation grant, on the sites of the old vanished seaports as well.

Mr. Casson is that rare bird in American university employment, a scholar-teacher who can write; and that, of course, is where the touch of the artist comes in. What a pleasure to read him. The dust jacket announces he is an amateur sailor of twenty years, and indeed one notes almost everywhere in these pages a fresh-air breather, as well as professor, on the job. Casson writes of men and ships long ages gone but the awful stillness



—From the book.

A Roman warship used in the Battle of Actium, 32 B.C.

of thousands of years of death has not lengthened his face nor slowed his hand. If he heard the sirens of scholarship for its own sake, he resisted their song. And so he was not washed onto that shore where the bones of living-dead academics lie bleaching, but made it home with a fine, fascinating book after his years of wanderings in the watery part of history.

Again, the author does not present what happened in history as inevitable. His scrutiny of the ancients in their sea lanes, their scramblings for sea influence and power, their gropings with cartography, achieves a transcending value as a study in human nature. Small and mistaken people, as well as the big and deep ones, then as now, were sometimes thrust forward by circumstances. “Anybody can make history,” said Oscar Wilde. “Only a great man can write it.”

Many of the passages quietly cry for quotation. In a chapter called “The Dawn of Maritime Exploration,” Mr. Casson sifts the legendary from the historical. Jason, skipper of the *Argo*, was heading eastward.

Why not westward? The golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides, which later Greeks located near the Strait of Gibraltar, would seem just as fair and tangible a prize as a golden fleece. But perhaps not. Later ages knew that the peoples who lived at the farther end of the

Black Sea where Jason’s *Aea* was located had a way of washing gold from a river by tying fleeces in the stream so that particles of the dust would adhere to them. It was the earliest known form of placer mining. If we assume that rumors of this had reached Jason’s part of the world, the “search for the golden fleece” suddenly comes into focus; it becomes a search for treasure, a completely understandable reason for daring exploration.

Increased understanding of the ways by which exploration proceeded is the other larger view which the reader gains from this book. No one can get the picture, really, of geographical discovery without some knowledge of ships, sail, and navigation. The winds and waters of the world go round and round and little by little men have learned to use them. “History in a way was only repeating itself when the Portuguese opened up Africa, and Spain, America.” I do not know about that. For the most part, history repeats itself because historians repeat one another. Still and all, this handsome book is unique.

**GIBRALTAR:** Ten generations of English soldiers have done duty in “the Rock’s” gloomy corridors, not to mention the Spaniards and Moors, who came before them. Its forbidding face is familiar to all Americans literate enough to read an insurance advertisement, and it played a part in the

American Revolution as well as American operations in the Second World War.

The story of Gibraltar is told in Allen Andrews's "**Proud Fortress**" (Dutton, \$3.75) by photographs as well as text. With a subject of such possibilities, it is a pity that they haven't been fully realized. For the book covers only the superficialities of the two and a half centuries the Rock has been a British fortress. The writing is smooth to the point of being slick, and no sources are cited.

In spite of its shortcomings, "**Proud Fortress**" limns a satisfactory portrait for the reader who likes his history in small and palatable doses. One of Gibraltar's many climaxes came in the fall of 1942 during the preparations for Operation TORCH (the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa). It was then that Winston Churchill commended the stronghold to the care of its new temporary commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, with the message: "The Rock of Gibraltar is safe in your hands."

Still, Churchill may have had a few doubts. At any rate, he made certain by adding to the numbers of the celebrated Barbary apes, which are believed to insure the safety of the proud fortress as long as they remain on the job. And once again they made good.

—LYNN MONTROSS.

## BRITANNIA

# A Ride Before the Sun Set

**"Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist,"** by Philip Magnus (Dutton. 410 pp. \$6.50), evaluates, after forty years, the reputation of a controversial English titan. The author's terms of reference disturb Major General Jim Dan Hill, Army U.S., Ret., who is both an historian and the president of State College in Superior, Wis.

By Jim Dan Hill

SOME biographers have a bad habit of measuring their man's place in history with a micrometer gauged to their own modern environment. This often results in an anachronism of values.

A juvenile education film of early vintage exemplifies the scope of possible error inherent in such practices. The film presented Paul Revere, booted, spurred, spreading the alarm astride a Kentucky thoroughbred. The engrossed, eighth-grade audience

naturally accepted this, but when Revere and his steed flashed past a series of telephone poles, a thin voice shrilled: "The Big Dope! Why doesn't he phone 'em?"

Sir Philip Magnus is, of course, infinitely more artful than the producer of that crude Revere film. He has a bird dog's skill at flushing obscure but interesting and cogent facts. His text often bristles with pertinent and sprightly quotations. His paragraphs have the clarity and tight coherence one associates with the best in historical narration. But he arrives at his evaluations within such modern terms of reference that his criticisms of Kitchener are as jarringly anachronistic as the juvenile judgment of Paul Revere.

Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916) was a rugged individualist through an era in which individualism was a virtue. Splendid improvisations were the hallmark of genius. There appears to be no place for such men in England's bureaucracy wonderland of collective planners, who chart from womb to tomb the security, health, wealth, and welfare of each and every citizen. In any event, Sir Philip takes a stern, modern, British Civil Service viewpoint of him: "... he was useless for teamwork; disorderly with documents."

Lord Kitchener: Viscount of Khartoum; map maker of the Holy Land and Cyprus; in service of the Khedive, achieving command of the Egyptian army; triumphant in Sudan; victorious in South Africa; C.-in-C. of the Indian Armies; *de facto* overlord of Egypt and the Sudan; thence to Asquith's Liberal Cabinet at the outbreak of World War I as Secretary of State for War. He died in the sinking of *H.M.S. Hampshire* while en route to Russia. It is a career that personifies the British Empire at its Victorian zenith.

But with Sir Philip imperialists are anathema: Kipling was an apologist for Empire. Disraeli was bad. Little Englander Gladstone, of whom Sir Philip is a more enthusiastic biographer, was a precursor of modern right. Between the brutality of Russian imperialism and the bounties of "American imperialism" Sir Philip sees no basis for British competition. With the decline of England's Empire thus rationalized into a good riddance, how



"... We will filibuster on the beaches, we will filibuster in the towns, we will filibuster ..."