

BOOK REVIEWS

The Heart of the Skyloo. By OTTIS BEDNEY SPERLIN. (Portland: The Metropolitan Press. Pp. 344. \$2.00.)

Long Beach, California, is the capital of Iowa; so it is fitting that the author of *The Heart of the Skyloo* should have been born in Kokomo, Indiana. He came to Washington in 1908. As head of the English department in Stadium High School, Tacoma; as principal of the Moran School; now, as lecturer in English and education at the University of Washington, he has lived himself into the life of the State.

His interest in his present subject may be said to have begun with the edition of *The Oregon Trail* which he prepared for Longmans, Green and Company in 1910. He went on to a careful study of the Northwest Indian, supplementing actual field work with an extensive course of reading in the published and unpublished journals of early traders and explorers.

In *The Heart of the Skyloo*, his problem has been to describe the native culture, first as it existed before the coming of the white man, later as modified by contact with the fur-traders and the Catholic missionaries. David Thompson, Alexander Ross, and others are among the characters who appear in the later part of the book.

Gamaliel Bradford used to insist that our modern age was pre-eminently the age of ignorance, the true Dark Age, not because there is no information available but because there is too much. We are swamped under the accumulating mass of our own knowledge, absolutely incapable of assimilating more than an infinitesimal amount of it. To gather information about Northwest history or any other subject can be of very little importance if we stop there. We must go on to relate our knowledge to our lives, to appreciate its human significance, and I know of no better way of doing this than for the artist to make it real for us in a work of the imagination.

There are difficulties in the way. It is always hard to see the significance of what lies close at home. For years American romancers spun sword-and-cloak romances of European intrigue; it was not until Emerson Hough wrote a book in Evanston, Illinois, that most Americans began to realize there had once been such things as covered wagons in America and that covered wagons were capable of imaginative re-creation in art. Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* proved that the stuff of faery may be derived from the

very skyscrapers and railroad trains of our mechanical age. And Robert Nathan's *One More Spring* found comedy, gaiety, and romance in the depression itself.

Another difficulty is that only rarely, as in Sir Walter Scott, for example, are the artist and the scholar united. Perhaps that is why Scott is the greatest of all British novelists. Artists as a class are notoriously an ignorant lot, and scholars, as we all know, are dry as dust. Mr. Sperlin's plunge into imaginative writing has, however, been in large measure successful. He has a sense of drama, a flair for character, and distinctly a sense of style. I would urge, however, that if he goes on to write more books in this field—as I hope he may—his style ought to be made more simple. He has used Indian words so freely that many passages are nearly if not quite unintelligible without reference to the glossary, and this makes his book uncommonly hard reading.

I should add that Mr. Sperlin has learned from the Indians some of the secrets that reveal themselves to love alone. Their life was different from ours. If they were weak where we are strong, they were also strong where we are weak, and those who have been reared on dime novels and movie serials will hardly be prepared for what they find here. There are passages in *The Heart of the Skyloo* which remind me of the late Mary Austin, whose experience with the Indians of the Southwest was so illuminating. There was a time in her life when Mrs. Austin was cut from all close contact with the culture of her own people in the east. Instead of allowing her intellectual life to stagnate, as nine people out of ten would have done, she seized this opportunity to learn to know the Indians. From them she learned many valuable secrets, secrets which white men have forgotten and which they need desperately to learn.

Mr. Sperlin has designed *The Heart of the Skyloo* as a tribute to his wife, the late Grace Smith Sperlin—"Hire spirit chaunged hous"—during her long residence in Washington so useful and so kindly a citizen. As a piece of bookmaking, it is the best thing I have seen so far from the Metropolitan Press.

EDWARD WAGENKNECHT

The Renaissance and the Reformation. By HENRY STEPHEN LUCAS.
(New York: Harper Brothers, 1934. Pp. 765. \$4.00.)

The appearance of this book is an occasion for thankfulness among all serious students of our cultural heritage. The need for a