

3/3/13

Reviews:

- Roman street
- Italian sketches

U.G.

DURRANT'S PRESS CUTTINGS

29-39, Mount Pleasant, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: CENTRAL 3149 (Two Lines).

The Times

Printing House Square, London, E.C.4.

13 FEB 1964

Cutting from issue dated.....

Roman Pictures

MAURICE ROWDON: *A Roman Street*.
160pp. Gollancz. 2Ts.

UGO ENRICO PAOLI: *Rome. Its People,
Life and Customs*. 336pp. Longmans.
42s.

Living in Rome and enjoying contemporary life there with an infectious zest, Mr. Rowdon can also look back without nostalgia on the city's past. The transformation scene of recent years is described as Mr. Rowdon comes across it. He watches his neighbours with the same observant and appreciative understanding as he does changes of street and shop. He is an amateur of medieval Rome. Only in that part, he feels, "do you get a real breath of Christianity, as in some of the Rhineland towns of Germany". He reflects that the air must once have been dusty in the summer in Rome like desert air with breaths from the sea all the time and he goes on to suggest that a last glimpse of that Rome must have been had in the first years of the nineteenth century. This leads him to pine trees sprouting out of the Caracalla ruins, Shelley sitting under the arches of the old baths, and to Goethe's drawings.

His comments on Italian and Sicilian wines (not invariably, he thinks, made from the grape) are delicious. So are some of the incidents—a hair-cut gives him a chance to get a grateful laugh from any but a stern unbending reader. There is no fear in him of generalizations—"solidarity between the common people is unknown in Italy", "Italy continues to offer the best picture we have today of the act of conversion to Christianity". Mr. Rowdon is such good company that he could have written at greater length without risk of becoming tedious.

Dr. Paoli's *Rome* was first published as *Vita Romana* in 1940 and has been translated into four languages. Mr. R. D. Macnaghten, a classics master at Eton, has done this excellent English version of a guide to the people, life and customs of ancient Rome. It is well illustrated and will please all who enjoy paperback translations of Latin authors as well as more specialist readers.

ITALIAN SKETCHES by Maurice Rowdon

21st March 1963.

"A most enjoyable book: comparable with Henry James's Italian Hours and D.H. Lawrence's Twilight in Italy."

MICHAEL INNES
(J.I.M. Stewart)

Michael Innes

ITALIAN SKETCHES by Maurice Rowdon

19th June 1963.

"Recalls Lawrence's Twilight in Italy almost uncannily. The perfect antidote to the effusive outsider's travel book. The results are superficially glum, but in retrospect and artistically exhilarating, because so often piercingly accurate and so far under the skin of everyday appearances that it is really a new reappraisal almost of a new country... Extreme spiritual delicacy as well as physical sensibility."

ISABEL QUIGLY (GUARDIAN)

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②

"Full of the most delightful character sketches. Most enjoyable."

BRITISH WEEKLY

ITALIAN SKETCHES by Maurice Rowdon

21st June 1963.

"It is a real pleasure to come across a quite original book entitled Italian Sketches. Mr. Rowdon is astonishingly acute in recognising in the Italians a quality which impels them to spare foreigners embarrassment or mortification... It is a relief to read this factual book about Italy. I derived much pleasure from this book and recommend it warmly."

HAROLD NICOLSON
(The Observer)

*note
about
and, p. 10. tonight*

"Only for those who love Italy with such an indecent obsession that they positively welcome an author who is weak enough to be similarly infatuated but strong enough to list a hundred reasons why he shouldn't be... If it were possible to explain why Mr. Rowdon's ideas are so acceptable, it would be possible to explain Italy - and if this were possible, nobody would write books about Italy any more. All books about Italy are frantic attempts to try and understand the nature of its fascination, and if Mr. Rowdon's book is one of the best attempts that has been made for many years, this is because he tries so deeply to understand and must excite the sympathy of anyone else who has tried to do so."

NIGEL DENNIS (Sunday Telegraph)

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20th June 1963.

"When Mr. Rowdon writes as well as that, the delighted reader forgives him all his prejudice."

JOHN RAYMOND (Sunday Times)

ITALIAN SKETCHES by Maurice Rowdon

3rd July 1963.

"He ... writes superbly and sheds a light on Italy that came to me as a complete surprise."

S.P.B. MATS (Oxford Mail)

SPARE

U.C.

DURRANT'S PRESS CUTTING

29-39, Mount Pleasant, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: CENTRAL 3149 (Two Lines).

New Statesman

10, Great Turnstile, London, W.C.1.

Cutting from issue dated..... 14 FEB 1964

NEW STATESMAN · 14 FEBRUARY 1964

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In Evil Times

Arabia Felix. By THORKILD HANSEN. Translated by James and Kathleen McFarlane. Collins. 30s.

Three Victorian Travellers. By THOMAS ASSAD. Routledge. 25s.

Forks and Hope. By ELSPETH HUXLEY. Chatto. 30s.

An African Student in China. By EMMANUEL JOHN HEVI. Pall Mall. 25s.

A Roman Street. By MAURICE ROWDON. Gollancz. 21s.

Whether they are discovering America, banning the slave trade or promoting equality, Scandinavians seem always some years in advance of the rest of us. In 1761 the Danes determined upon a positive and progressive national exploit, 'despite the cares of government in these evil times', as their King put it. Europe was stiff with a militarism that had spread out even to India and America; there must be somewhere else to go, something else to do. Therefore the King dispatched a great scientific expedition to Arabia Felix, the happy land. Sensible men were carefully trained, diplomatic and inter-university co-operation was assured; yet running through all this cool sanity was a thread of romance, and with romance came mania and chaos. Thorkild Hansen's sad, elegant account of this terrible journey suggests that 'it is only in evil times that men dream of voyaging to Arabia Felix.' Happiness was not achieved. The journey lasted six years and only one man, Carsten Niebuhr, survived.

Still they got some work done, even though most of it was neglected and went to waste - because, suggests Hansen, the Danish members of the party were inferior to the rest and brought home no national glory. Besides their work, Hansen has discovered so much about the explorers as people that his book reads like a novel: a pessimistic allegory in which two hero-scientists battle through the barbarity of a strange land but suffer most from the conventions, indolence and pettiness of their own people. (It seems appropriate that the one humanist on the expedition should have purchased arsenic to poison the scientists.) The first hero is a brilliant young Swede, Forsskal, so agreeable to humble people and so fierce to the pretentious. Linnaeus named a stinging-nettle after him - much to the fury of Forsskal's friend, the engineer Niebuhr. They are an odd combination, the disdainful Swede, whose work was wasted, and the modest, practical peasant Niebuhr who did so much, outside his own discipline, and returned home alone to be forgotten. It is pleasant to find this energetic pair relaxing, when the dancing-

girls show up or when they are smuggling sweets to slave-girls through a port-hole.

Niebuhr gained the confidence of the Arabs without affectation. He treated them precisely as equals, adopting their language, their dress and their modest way of life, 'renouncing his own self,' says Hansen. 'The last 200 years in Asia and Africa have been based on precisely opposite principles.' But Niebuhr wasn't posing; his attitude was the natural result of his good manners and efficiency. The three English travellers in Professor Assad's book wore Arab clothes to look at themselves. A great deal has been written by, and about, all three - Burton, Blunt and Doughty. One prime aspect of these xenophiles has been plucked out by the American author, their Englishness. C. M. Doughty hoped to purify himself and his style, to bring his country and its language back to an Old Testament austerity. To this end, he would let the Arabs bully him, but Richard Burton preferred to bully. He would revive sex and toughness in his race - 'real fighting people', compared with the Arabs - and strengthen the Empire. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt loathed the Empire and chose to pretend that Arab ways were superior.

For Elspeth Huxley, the spirit of Blunt is still alive. She quotes him as the forerunner of all the evil left-wingers who have spoiled East Africa when things were going so nicely. Still, she's getting very 'tolerant'. A BOAC steward was telling me recently how much Nairobi has improved: 'I used to feel apologetic, *servile* to the blacks, because of the whites. But they don't shout "Boy!" any more. They almost whisper.' That is what Miss Huxley is doing in her account of modern East Africa, just whispering: they never invented the clock, they're tougher with their own people

than we'd have dared, Wodehouse and Lewis Carroll are a closed book to them, they don't fall in love as we know it. Bright and patronising, like a snobbish teacher at a slum school, she offers plenty of useful information, blames the Kikuyu (not the 1955 Royal Commission) for small-scale farming and still suspects there's something wrong with black men's genes. She has used Mannoni's psychological study of disaffection in Madagascar as if it were propaganda for white supremacy; and she is too prone to generalise about, say, the position of 'African' women.

Emmanuel John Hevi, a Ghanaian, has a higher regard for his female compatriots than Miss Huxley's book might suggest. He is quite lyrical about them, finding it hard to meet anyone abroad who is adequately 'feminine'. But that is only one of the disadvantages that this liberal traveller found in Communist China. He is an egalitarian and he really expected a classless society there. The usual problem recurs: he resented receiving the privileges of an expatriate but he did not want to share the deplorable conditions of the natives. This angry book should not be dismissed as propaganda, designed for the capitalist world. It is meant to dissuade Ghanaians from following the Chinese pattern.

Much as Maurice Rowdon loves Rome, he is using the alien situation as if he were one of those Victorian Arabists: it provides a sidelight on himself and his society. His roots are in dingy South London. He distrusts the 'pagan clatter and spectacle' of Rome, a city which means to him both fascism - very broadly defined - and 'strong nerves', a quality he much admires. The conflict makes his book vivid and sometimes exciting.

D. A. N. JONES

DURRANT'S PRESS CUTTINGS

29-39, Mount Pleasant, London, W.C.1.
Telephone: CENTRAL 3149 (Two Lines).

Birmingham Post

Birmingham.

Clipping from issue dated..... 29/2/64

Round the Shelves

MUMFORD VERSUS THE MOTOR-CAR

THE Buchanan Report appeared too late for mention in Lewis Mumford's *The Highway and the City*. We can imagine the reply, devastatingly ironical if courteous, which this distinguished American would make to the Report. Here, he would say, in the apotheosis of the motor-car, the legend of the Frankenstein monster is coming true.

Fifteen essays deal with modern architecture and with town and rural planning in the United States and in different European countries. England receives some good marks. The rebuilding of London's East End, Coventry Cathedral and shopping-centre, and most of our post-war schools and factories, not least in the New Towns, are warmly commended. By contrast, the new London power-stations, with their pseudo-classic smokestacks, are "miracles of urgid inanity" while the new buildings in the City of London "represent British philistinism in its most crass and shortsighted form". Unesco House in Paris, Unity House in Marseilles and the American Embassy in London are among other buildings discussed.

Mr. Mumford spiritively debates the theory that architecture should be "functional", and should represent its time. On the latter point he retorts that modern architecture at its worst might be taken as a warning that much is wrong with the age all too faithfully reflected. As to "function", it should

of course inspire architecture; only let us, in heaven's name, conceive "function" in relation to the whole of man's complex nature and abiding needs, not just his temporary rush of technology to the head. So, at the end, Mr. Mumford returns to his starting-place. The current "religion of the motor-car," beloved symbol of economic progress and of social status, is corrupting the spirit of man, as any false worship must do. Not only so: through sheer force of numbers the motor-car is defeating its promise of speed, just as it despoils the countryside it makes accessible and the towns it clutters up. "The first lesson we have to learn is that a city exists, not for the constant passage of motor-cars, but for the care and culture of men."

On the all-determining factor of transport, including the right use of the motor-car and the role of railways—which, if destroyed, may some day have to be built again—Mr. Mumford, advising us to profit by America's "sour" experience, offers unfashionable but constructive ideas. If even those who share his general outlook may wish to dispute with him now and then, and if certain issues, such as the population explosion, may seem to receive inadequate attention, the book as a whole is a rousing challenge

The Highway and the City. By Lewis Mumford. 25s. Secker.
The Art of Leadership. By S. W. Roskill. 21s. Collins.
A Roman Street. By Maurice Rowdon. 21s. Collinckz.
The World of Monsieur Vincent. By Mary Purcell. 30s. Harvill.

to much current thought—or lack of thought.

Addressed primarily to members or prospective members of the armed forces, *The Art of Leadership* carries much wider implications. Captain S. W. Roskill, R.N., now a Fellow of Nuffield College, firmly believes in technology and democracy, but, like Mr. Mumford, he sees them bringing new dangers along with fresh opportunities. They should expand, not be allowed to contract, human horizons in the fuller and deeper sense. Leadership is more than ever necessary, but it must be of a better kind.

Domination, never commendable, has ceased to be possible; persuasion and example must take its place. The leader must be a man of broad culture, of faith, of strict integrity. With spiritual vision, imagination and human sympathy must go moral courage, humility, charity, cheerfulness and courtesy. A tall order? Agreed! Captain Roskill writes far from glibly or smugly. Holding up the ideal which he cautions us against, supposing them easy of fulfilment, particularly as only a half's breadth separates each virtue from its own latent vice. Thus, resolution, which every leader must possess, easily becomes obstinacy, which has been many leaders' undoing. Draw.

By Gilbert Thomas

THE MOTOR-CAR

ing on personal experience, and providing apt illustrations from history and biography, the author suggests how a wide range of virtues must constantly counter-check and cross-fertilise one another.

Maurice Rowdon has followed up *Italian Sketches with A Roman Street*. Living in a flat on the top floor of an old palazzo in Rome, he describes, with a mixture of affection and sardonic humour, his fellow tenants and neighbours, the local shopkeepers, the folk encountered on his walks. Rome and its people simultaneously fascinate and slightly repel him. This ambivalent attitude makes for richly individual and entertaining reading. It also moves Mr. Rowdon to subtly sensitive reflection on the elusive Italian temperament, which, despite basic weaknesses, has yet exercised a dominant influence on world history. The author passes by such easy transitions from gay to grave that one might well underestimate an art so cleverly concealing itself.

St. Vincent de Paul has not lacked biographers, but *The World of Monsieur Vincent* is its own justification. In following the career of this lovable, visionary yet down-to-earth late-medieval figure, who, as founder of the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity, combined compassion with administrative ability in rare degree, Mary Purcell at every stage fills in the local and historical background with detail that, vivid and interesting in itself, serves to throw the central portrait into sharper relief.

T.L.S.

19 MAR 1964 239

STREET SCENES

MAURICE ROWDON: *A Roman Street*. 160pp. Gollancz. 21s.

Mr. Rowdon has all the qualities needed to prompt an affection for him (among so many rivals) as a writer about Rome. His feeling for the city is a nice blend of love and impatience, he saves himself from bouts of nostalgia with sudden snorts of faith in Rome's ability to consume and even be nourished by modern materialism. He can describe what he sees and hears with an unpretentious immediacy that brings a scene instantly and enduringly to life. He is full of variety. At one moment crankily obsessed with, say, the chemical additives in wine and *pasta*, at the next he is thoughtfully and generously explaining how the Romans have come to be as they are. His style is extremely simple: short words and short sentences, yet every now and then he takes off on a purely literary flight of fancy that carries the reader with it in hilarious or tender acceptance. Elsewhere a pawkily embittered *longueur* is followed by some crashing generalization about the Roman attitude to art, sex, learning or the church.

The heart of the book is about the street where he lives, the tenants of the neighbouring apartments, the men and women who work in the nearby shops and *trattorie*. This is amusing, exact and relaxedly done. But it is in the combination of this ruminative core with sudden forays of speculation, moments when he pounds his desk with rage, or peers closely into someone's window that the special interest of the book resides. We get to know Rome. We would like to get to know Mr. Rowdon.

u.g.

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29-39, Mount Pleasant, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: CENTRAL 3149 (Two Lines).

The Observer

22, Tudor Street, London, E.C.4.

Cutting from issue dated.....16.FEB.1964....

Roman roundabout

A ROMAN STREET. By Maurice Rowdon. (Gollancz. 21s.)

THERE are always plenty of books about Rome, the newest and oldest of the world capitals seems almost to obsess us. But there is now a change of emphasis. "Holy City" books and "sun and wine" books have gone out of fashion. Monuments remain and daily life, perhaps helped by the cinema, is coming in. Mr Rowdon is a first-class daily-life writer and all the Romanists will want to read him.

He starts out from his terraced flat up 90 stairs of a fourteenth- to sixteenth-century palazzo in the heart of old Papal Rome. He looks at the lackadaisical proprietress and at the concierge who, I think, is suffering from *fegato* or liver. He gets to know, or know of, other inhabitants—the Calabrian woman who rehearses blasphemous plays, the deafening off-key singer, the juke-box

players, the priest who blesses the house. He spends his leisure with the locals in the *trattoria*—which has not yet got neon lighting.

In this way, without any apparent effort, he has built up a picture of how ordinary people live; and to me every word of it rings true. In the proliferation of Rome, people, like suburbs, are changing. The dark statuesque women of tradition have turned into lithe blondes and chestnuts (often natural), the lounging men into hurrying figures with briefcases.

Mr Rowdon prefers the simple and Gothic tradition to paganism and Baroque grandeur. He extols the ancient Etruscans as well as the Christians; "the smile of their gods is the first sign of peace." This is more than an echo of D. H. Lawrence and I am not quite convinced. But what of it in a descriptive writer who reminds us of Lawrence?

Bernard Wall

DURRANT'S PRESS CUTTINGS

22-30, Mount Pleasant, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: CENTRAL 3149 (Two Lines).

Western Mail

Cardiff.

Cutting from issue dated 15/2/64

BOOKS IN BRIEF

A ROMAN STREET, by Maurice Rowdon, Gollancz; 21s. Zestful and informative essay on the contemporary Italian scene. Well written and laced with sparkling wit.

LAW AND LIFE, by G. D. Roberts, Q.C. Allen; 25s. The autobiography of one of our foremost lawyers, who has taken part in many major trials, including the Nuremberg war crime trials. A splendid insight into our legal system.

THIS FOR CAROLINE, by Doris Leslie Heineemann; 21s. A historical novel designed to present Lady Caroline Lamb in a better light than usual. Whether or not you agree with the interpretation you will find the novel skilfully written and immensely entertaining.

Times Lit. Suppl.

79.5.64

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239

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17th July 1963.

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- THE TABLET

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