

## Reviews.

DENMARK AND THE DANES. By ETHEL CARLETON WILLIAMS, M.A.  
(London: Methuen, 7/6 net.)

It is always an interesting task to review a book written by a member of our Society and the interest is enhanced when the book is both as readable and knowledgeable as the present volume. Miss Carleton Williams obviously knows Denmark thoroughly; but even so, it would have been easy to make a dull book with a recital, in true guide book manner, of the obvious sights and threadworn legends of that land. But "Denmark and the Danes" is far from being a stilted guide book; it is a charmingly written historical survey of all that the visitor to the land of the Vikings would wish to see and know—"old castles, manor houses, sparkling fjords, windswept dunes, remote village churches and stately cathedrals, all set in a historical background in which Kings and Queens, poets and statesmen live again." It is a book both for the eager wanderer and it is a book for the fireside; such a combination is not too frequently found in these hurried days.

There is one chapter which will have a special interest for the English reader, whether he ever go to Denmark or not, and we cannot do better than let Miss Carleton Williams open it in her own words. "I wonder how many admirers of Mary, Queen of Scots, realise that if they would stand beside the coffin of her third husband, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, they must travel, not to Scotland, but to Denmark, for the last years of that wild, ill-balanced life were spent in captivity in Dragsholm Castle. There, for five long years, his proud spirit beat vainly against the bars of his prison, and when at length death came, it was not as the dread enemy, but as a friend. From Dragsholm, Bothwell was borne out to burial in the parish church of Faarevejle three miles away."

The authoress goes on to record how she visited this ancient church one Autumn morning, past fields of golden corn, along a road gay with blue chicory, to gaze upon the features of the

Scots refugee. "The sacristan, who shows visitors round the church, has been so long in its service that he looks upon its treasures as his own. With a loving finger he touches the beautiful iron scrollwork on the inner door leading into the church and dwells upon its age and history. Faarevejde is a simple little church, and the sacristan points with pride to a list of vicars on the north wall, which begins in the year 1536; to the fine reredos and to the life-size figures of the rood by the chancel arch. He reserves the supreme interest of the church to the end, and in silence rolls up the matting by the arch, raises the boards of the floor and discloses a vault, in one corner of which is a coffin, shaped like a tree-trunk, which contains the body of James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. The skeleton, or mummy, as the Danes call it, can be seen through the sheet of glass forming the lid of the coffin. It is that of a man of medium height and powerful build, lying with folded hands. The head, with its broad forehead and massive jaw, suggests a man of action, and the high cheek-bones are Scottish in type. In the coffin are the tattered fragments of a silk pillow and silken shroud, showing that he was buried as befitted his rank."

This excerpt will suffice to indicate that no one could wish for a more able or pleasant guide than Miss Carleton Williams and the traveller who has been sated with the charms of Brittany, Normandy and the Castles of the Rhine may well turn to the land to which England is bound by ties more pleasant to recall than fire and sword and the crushing geld of pre-Norman days. Such a traveller should not fail to include in his luggage a copy of "Denmark and the Danes." There are sixteen illustrations and an excellent map.

E.W.D.

KENNET COUNTRY. By F. S. THACKER. (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 15/- net.).

This is an exceedingly pleasant and well written book and not a few antiquarian delinquencies might be forgiven its author because of its charm. And by this we do not mean that delectable diction is its only claim to notice. But in traversing any wide range of historical country, the "stranger" is apt to include in

his wallet at least a few stories of perennial sanctity but doubtful veracity. We had not turned many pages when we alighted upon such an example which set us wondering whether similar debateable matter had been included in sections where we were not so well qualified to notice them. Let us get this cleared away before we mete out the more generous praise to which the whole book is entitled. Mr. Thacker accepts at full value presumably the story that the north doorway in St. Mary's Church, Reading, now incorporated in a small chapel, is a relic of the original church founded in the 10th century by Queen Elfrida as an act of reparation for the murder of her stepson Edward at Corfe Castle. Quite apart from the fact that this local pious act has never been substantiated, the doorway in question appears to have no claim at all to be a piece of original work of the early period assigned to it. And again, Mr. Thacker, we are not at all one with you and the late Rev. Charles Kerry in your beliefs that the original church of St. Laurence in Reading was dedicated to St. Matthew and was demolished to make room for the erection of Reading Abbey in the early part of the twelfth century. We are inclined to the belief that these two questions are best left in the realm of the unavouched until fresh evidence becomes available.

" Kennet Country " covers a wide area and the author has brought within his ambit Reading, Thatcham, Newbury, Kintbury, Hungerford, Ramsbury, Avebury, Marlborough and Aldbourne, and dozens of minor villages and hamlets that lie on and along the pleasant stretches of the river. He appears to have travelled his country on foot, which is the only way such an itinerary should be made—in wind, rain, hail and sun. As may be supposed by those who have attempted a similar task, the historic data with which the book is sustained is taken from the innumerable sources open to every student of historical research ; and with the minatory warning as to the verification of authorities before him, he seems to have made a careful selection and excluded the more threadbare and doubtful sources of information. There are quaint touches of local lore and enlivening tales of village life interspersed in the running commentary ;

and unfriendly inns, the quality of ale, architectural eyesores, and here and there a soupçon of political economy, engross his attention as he tramps the measured miles, and notes the glowing beauty of April's burgeoning, deep sunsets behind dark hills and the carol of the blackbird upon a hawthorn bush. He has "discovered" some interesting village stories, and a "piece of record" about Thatcham and its parson, and the story of the "poore man downam" of Wasing will be new to many Berkshire folk. The latter is a delightful example, phonetically rendered, in the manner of four centuries ago.

It would require many pages to notice in detail the numerous items of interest with which this book is filled. As it has been many years in the making some of the buildings of which the author speaks, such as Southcote Manor and the old Abbey Wall cottages at Reading, are no longer with us, having been demolished since he visited the district in which they were situated. In a few particulars the author's observation or source of information is at fault. It is incorrect to state that the Holy Brook flows through the Biscuit Factory at Reading and joins its parent stream below Blake's lock. The Brook joins the Kennet by the Abbey Ruins, and it is the Kennet itself which joins up with Rennie's "Cut" near Blake's Lock. The Jacobean pulpit which was once at Sonning is not in St. Michael's Church, Tilehurst; but in Tylehurst St. George's Church, Reading. Ufton Court is not "Stuart," but "Tudor" and the date of the building which is given as 1662, is not correct. Parts of the structure date back to the fifteenth century, and there is evidence to suggest that the front portion of the house was built soon after 1560. We strongly suspect also that the description beneath the woodcut facing p. 330 should read "Blake's Lock, Reading" and not "County Lock, Reading." But these points are of minor importance in a volume containing such a plethora of good things.

We can without hesitation recommend this book to our readers. It should be on the shelves of all to whom the rivers of Kennet and Thames are a source of pride and pleasure. Its

defects are few ; its merits many ; and at times the author's prose reaches a very high level. It has style without affectation. We shall hope to hear more of Mr. Thacker at no distant date. We ought not to neglect a word of praise to the illustrator, Mr. Thomas Derrick, for his appropriate and charming woodcuts ; and to the publisher, Mr. Basil Blackwood, for the tasteful format in which the book has been issued to the public. E.W.D.

THE CHARTERS OF GORING. (PART II.)

We have received vol. II. of the Charters of Goring issued by the Oxfordshire Record Society. The first volume was reviewed in the Autumn, 1932, number of the Journal.