

Reviews.

THE ANCIENT BURIAL-MOUNDS OF ENGLAND, by L. V. GRINSELL.
London : Methuen, 12/6 net.

The author of this book is a member of the Berks. Archæological Society and has generously contributed of his knowledge to our Journal. Students have for long awaited an analytical and comprehensive survey of what hitherto has been scattered and fugitive knowledge in the proceedings of learned societies and in county and local histories. And now we have been fortunate enough to obtain what the publishers announce as the only modern study of the subject in existence and one that will have an appeal to all lovers of the countryside as well as to the archaeologist.

The author enters upon his task with some general observations in the form of an introduction. As he rightly points out, the custom of burying the dead under heaps of earth and stones known as burial-mounds or barrows is widely distributed, and it is from these mounds that the archæologist has obtained much of the material by means of which he is reconstructing the past history of the human race. The subject is a vast one : in England alone the number of barrows has been estimated at between thirty and forty thousand, and an authority is of opinion that ten thousand of these lie upon the Yorkshire moors. But any such estimate can only be approximate ; the author, himself, has, within the last few months, chanced upon an unrecorded chambered long barrow in our own county, and it is highly probable that in remote parts similar discoveries yet remain to be made as a more intensive search is undertaken. Further, the ploughman has taken an unconscious part in slowly removing the more obvious domes and saucers that dot the countryside and are relics of an ancient custom. The more dimly shown remains are being located from the air.

The first part of the book is devoted to the wider aspects of barrow study, while the second part gives a detailed account of selected regions. The general reader will find in the former much fascinating information about burial customs past and present, folk-lore, place-names associated with barrows and some sound advice in regard to skilled excavation. There is also a chapter on the type and chronology of barrows. Not a little awe has been engendered in the bucolic mind in ages past about these 'tumps,' and giants, fairies, pixies, the devil, ghosts, weird music and hidden treasure all play their part in an assemblage of lore, custom and belief. Here is a story from Norfolk : The devil was making a ditch and cleaned his spade by scraping it against a tree. A large lump of earth fell off which formed the barrow now known as Hangour Hill. Of mythical personages associated with barrows we need not go beyond the borders of our own county, and Mr. Grinsell tells again the story of Wayland Smith in a special chapter devoted to the region of the Berkshire Downs.

As may be supposed from the mystical elements which have been woven about these ancient mounds, there is a deep-seated belief that they contain, or once contained, treasure of incalculable value. The author gives numerous instances. "The early Anglo-Saxon poem of Beowulf contains an account of a search for hidden treasure in a chambered barrow, in the recesses of which were 'weapons and rich ornaments and vessels of heathen gold—watched over, as the story goes, for three hundred winters, by a dragon.'" Burials in coffins of gold or silver, crocks of gold, cups of precious metal with unearthly attributes, are not uncommon ; but perhaps the most amazing is the story of a barrow in Fifeshire which was so full of gold that when sheep lay on it their fleeces turned yellow ! This barrow was opened in 1819, and is reputed to have yielded silver to the value of a thousand pounds. A headless ghost was said to haunt the district near a barrow on Roundway Down, Devizes, and a horseman, similarly anatomically incomplete, struck terror into the hearts of the folk about Barrow Fields, Newquay.

But it would be erroneous to suppose that Mr. Grinsell's book deals mainly with the lore of his subject, interesting though this

be ; the larger part is an endeavour to treat of these burial-mounds from the more scientific and chronological angles, and few will begrudge him the success that has attended his efforts. It is a summary of the existing knowledge on the subject ; illustrated by numerous drawings and photographs—many of the latter from the air—and it has two exhaustive indices. By careful study and protracted labour he has produced a volume of great interest and value ; it is not too technical to confuse the layman and it is likely to remain for some time a model of approach to the analysis and distribution of the barrows of this country. It was not within the scope of the author's enquiry to tell us what manner of men they were who raised these landmarks to their dead. Perhaps we shall never be able to get much closer to this inscrutable subject, for oblivion has successfully scattered her poppy over those distant days. But the aura of mystery grips the imagination and the real secret of Silbury in Wiltshire—the largest artificial mound in Europe—still eludes us. There yet may emerge, however, some significant trappings which will lead us along a new and hitherto dim avenue and what is now obscure about our pre-historic forefathers will become clearer to the enquiring mind.

E. W. D.

THE LEGACY OF ENGLAND : AN ILLUSTRATED SURVEY OF THE
WORKS OF MAN IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRY. London :
Batsford. 5s. net.

In the publishers' brochure which heralded this book its purpose is admirably told. The beauty of Britain "owes much to the friendly care of Englishmen through the centuries ; Englishmen have tamed the land from a primeval wilderness to a charming garden, romantic and formal by turns, and have guarded their treasure from the invasion and devastation that have befallen other countries. Rather than replace their buildings they have often preferred to watch them evolve almost organically to their present perfection of age ; and in the process, through the use of native materials and perhaps a natural eye for appropriateness and setting, the buildings have grown into and become almost a

part of the soil, a legacy from the England of the past to the England of the present, which it is our privilege and duty and our children's to preserve." That is all very true, and the one hundred and fourteen illustrations in this book are a joyful emphasis of the fact.

The opening chapter on "The Landscape" is in the hands of Edmund Blunden, and is an exceedingly able piece of work, which combines, as few authors could, the large canvas of the English shires and the literary style and quality which we have learned to expect from him. As a Berkshire contribution to his theme, he says: "If tradition may be trusted, Chaucer was one of those who played some part in making the beauty of England. Two centuries and a half after his death (which happened A.D. 1400) Mr. Packer, worthy proprietor of Donnington Park, near Newbury, was pointing out three wonderful oaks, planted, 'and dedicated' there by Chaucer—the King's the Queen's and Chaucer's oak. Their stature and quality, at any rate, did honour to their planter." R. H. Mottram deals effectively and pleasingly with "The Country Town," and the other contributors, numbering six, are well informed in their respective spheres. But it will be to the illustrations that eyes will turn before the text is reached.

It would be an invidious task—though it has often been attempted by brave parochial spirits—to make a choice of the most beautiful villages in England. There are scores which can stake out a claim for consideration, and their claims would need to be seriously entertained. The folk of the home counties are naturally proud of their heritage, and point to the unspoilt charm of some of the more remote settings which still remain unaffected by the octopus of industrial growth and the ease of transport. I, personally, can find in Berkshire and in many corners of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, not forgetting Hampshire, all the beauty that centres in ancient settlements grouped on somewhat haphazard yet practical lines: the village green, the gray old church, the manor house, and the clustered warm-roofed cottages; hoary elms and pounds and low-browed inns; purling brooks like that at Cuxham, and the immemorial pond: the pleasant saunter of the ploughman and his sturdy steeds, and the miller's caravan

of green ; the vagrant wisps of carted hay in the hedgerows and the peerless scent of beans in flower. Others find the perfect setting in those lichened stone habitations and wind-swept heights of the Cotswolds ; or in the twisty, flower-decked lanes of Somerset and Devon. And it is only when you open a book such as this, that you come to realise that the real enchantment of England is plentifully distributed. It is everywhere. There is an old sun-splashed village on the stone belt in Northamptonshire called Wadenhoe—a lovely name—which is a sheer delight. Its houses have taken on a colouring that no synthetic washes of the modern chemist can hope to imitate. To see the light and shadow of the moving clouds behind the church steeple of Drewsteignton, in Devon ; or the sixteenth-century grouping of cottages in Elstow ; the wonderful panel and post work at Wilmington, Warwick ; or the calm beauty of Crossways at Abinger, loved of Meredithians ; the towering hills of Borrowdale with lonely cots asleep beneath them ; the gray stone almshouses of Chipping Campden and the aged leaning cottages by the churchyard at Odiham, is but to sample the rich legacy that has been bequeathed to us from the distant past, a heritage of beauty of which every Englishman can justly be proud. And in "The Legacy of England" you will find nearly six score specimens of this treasure, and woven between them a text of charm and interest that will enhance your gratitude and enlarge your mind. Messrs. Batsford have here set a high standard in book production at a very modest price. And, what is more, they have reached it.

E.W.D.