

## XVII.—REVIEW.

*Roman Britain*, by I. A. Richmond. 240 pp., with 8 Pls. and 12 figs. Penguin Books, 1955.

The enterprising publishers of the Penguin Books have again broken fresh ground with a "Pelican" History of England to be completed in eight volumes; and there can be no doubt that the Editor has gone to the right quarter in assigning to Prof. Ian Richmond the volume on Roman Britain.

It takes an unusually learned man to write a general history of Roman Britain. The periods immediately before and after have, indeed, difficulties of their own. But the material on which the study of Roman Britain rests is, for the most part, so much more accurately dated that generalities are less acceptable, and the great mosaic must be fitted together from so very much larger a number of pieces. It is, therefore, not surprising that among the authors of the vast output of studies on the Roman period in this country in the two centuries since Horsley wrote, few indeed have attempted a general synthesis, based on first-hand knowledge, and covering the subject as a whole. Within the past generation the late R. G. Collingwood has been the only scholar to scale this peak. Among our contemporaries Prof. Richmond, perhaps, alone has the skill and the stamina in his turn to complete the climb.

There is, indeed, a real need for a restatement of the present position; and this Penguin volume is the natural successor to Collingwood's little book on Roman Britain first published in the Oxford half-crown series in 1924. It is most sincerely to be hoped that Prof. Richmond will, like his distinguished predecessor, now go on to write that work on a

larger scale which shall take the place of Collingwood's final contribution in the shape of the first volume of the Oxford History of England—a book which, *mirabile dictu*, finds no place in the bibliography of the present volume. But Homer, too, nodded.

The subject is covered in five chapters on the main topics natural to the subject. They are packed with information, and yet the author has managed to give it all a rhythm and keep the story moving. It is the most readable account of the subject that has yet been written.

Where so much is so good it is invidious to particularize, but your reviewer has most enjoyed the first and last chapters, those on military history and religious cults. The complete conspectus of the military history of the country is something that is badly needed; while the subject of religion in Roman Britain has been more advanced by Prof. Richmond in recent years than by any man since Haverfield.

One cannot lay down this little volume without a word of appreciation of the manner in which it is written. Pithy, masculine English, combined with a luminous clarity of thought, makes every line a pleasure to read. It is, if possible, even better than the writer's unfailing felicity in the spoken word.

J. D. COWEN.