

XVI.—REVIEW.

THE TALE OF ATHENS. By ELLEN S. BOSANQUET. Illus. Methuen. 1932.

Athens has had many "devout lovers," and it is well known that Mrs. Bosanquet is of the number. This book of hers consists of a series of deftly drawn word-pictures giving the life-history of the City of the Violet Crown. Beginning in "the dark backward and abysm of time," before Crecops, half serpent and half man, became its king, she tells of the contest between Poseidon and Athena for its government, and of the gradual development of social order which is typified in the Theseus legend. She draws on Homer and Hesiod for a description of early Greek life in village and countryside, and so comes to the more solid ground of the seventh century, when the Acropolis was becoming less of a fortress and more and more the spiritual centre of the life of the state. Then follow the time of the Tyrants, the Persian invasion, the reconstruction of the city and the glories of the Parthenon, the Erechtheum, the Nike temple and the Theseum. But after the disastrous Sicilian expedition the fame of Athens waned, and at the close of the Veloponnesian war she lost her political supremacy.

The tale carries us on through Hellenistic and Roman times, when Athens (which Horace describes as grown quiet—*vacuas Athenas*) was still "the workshop of thought," the great university town of the Roman Empire. Byzantine rule followed, and, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, that of the Franks. From 1456 to 1821 the "soft and cynical" Turks held sway; and they alone were proof against the long spell Athens had exercised.

Under them she suffered her real Dark Ages, when her very name disappeared, so that maps printed it *Setines* or *Satina*. The Turks turned the Parthenon into a mosque, the Propylæa into a gunpowder store (which rightly blew up); yet they added to the town a certain picturesqueness of vines and running water. After the War of Liberation, and Byron's time, we come to King Otho, King George, and the modern revival. Under King George Athens "from a country town blossomed into a European capital; 'le petit Paris' it was affectionately called."

In Mrs. Bosanquet's succession of pictures there is exhibited an artist's love of colour and form. There is poetic imagination too, not random, but disciplined by archæological knowledge and by a feeling for historical perspective. Her use, in the later periods, of the chroniclers, of the memoirs of travellers making the grand tour, of the songs of a Klephtic bard, gives zest to the tale and reveals her wide range of reading. Modern analogies are well perceived and happily introduced. Correspondingly, an event like the rush into Greece of refugees from the burning streets of Smyrna, after the catastrophe of 1922, is paralleled in a passage from Thucydides. The frequent tragedy is relieved by a recognition of the broad trend of the human comedy. Throughout the moving tale there is (to quote her own words concerning the mosaics in Daphni), "a freedom, a humanity, a style" which are a constant source of pleasure. One is drawn to her pictures again and again, till one thinks of the old refrain :

*Cras amet qui nunquam amavit,
Quique amavit cras amet.*

The book is illustrated by some beautiful photographs, and by two end-papers. The first is a plan of the Acropolis, showing successive buildings; in the second the periodically expanding and contracting boundaries of the city, from Pelasgian down to Turkish times, are indicated by ingeniously varied outlines.

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