Supplement to NATURE

No. 3023

OCTOBER 8, 1927

Our Bookshelf.

Cultural and Anthropological Studies.

Life and Work in Medieval Europe (Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries). By Prof. P. Boissonnade. Translated, with an Introduction, by Dr. Eileen Power. (The History of Civilisation Series.) Pp. xix + 395 + 8 plates. (London: Kegan Paul and Co., Ltd.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927.) 16s. net.

MISS EILEEN POWER has introduced to us in an admirable translation a very important French book on the Middle Ages. Prof. Boissonnade may be thought to have exaggerated the good effects of the Roman Empire, and of its later successors for a thousand years in the East, and he may be said to have put too low the character of the invading barbarians and too high their devastating results. These are the sides on which his book is open to criticism and may need some modification. But he must be held to have made good his main contention that in the late Middle Ages, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, a work of economic and social development was accomplished in the West on which all later progress has been based, and which has hitherto not received the attention it deserves owing to the preoccupation of historians, on one hand, with the fighting which went on sporadically but continuously throughout, and, on the other, with the religious evolution which, on any showing, is the most characteristic and central fact. But in the new setting which Prof. Boissonnade gives us, the Church will find no cause to complain, for the religious houses, especially of the monastic orders, easily take the first place in the work of cultivating the soil, reclaiming waste places, encouraging labour and employing craftsmen of all kinds in the earlier dark period before the workman found his own place in the social order and claimed freedom and power.

It is this process of industrial emancipation which fills the second part of the essay, and shows how similar and continuous the upward movement has been ever since the barbarians settled down within the framework of the old Roman Empire. First, the colonisation of the soil, then the spread of craftsmanship and commerce, then the incorporation of the workers of all grades; this was the order of events, and they have never been so clearly exhibited, with such a wealth of learning, appropriately introduced and illustrated, as in this book.

F. S. MARVIN.

The Anglo-Saxons in England during the Early Centuries after the Invasion. By Nils Åberg. (Published with aid of grants from Vilhelm Ekmans Universitetsfond, Långmans Kulturfond, and the Swedish Government.) Pp. viii + 219. (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd.; Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells Boktr. A.B.; Haag: Martinus Nijhoff; Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1926.) 12s. 6d. net.

PROF. ÅBERG'S valuable analysis of Saxon style does not profess to be in any sense a complete survey of Anglo-Saxon art. It is an attempt to work out a chronology on the basis of the archaeological (typological) evidence, testing it, however, when possible, by the known facts of history. In any such analysis, Kent, as any one acquainted with the material is bound to realise, takes a prominent place. Prof. Åberg is of the opinion, however, that the undoubtedly distinctive position taken by Kentish culture is not to be attributed so much to race as might be thought if Bede's statement that the invaders of Kent, the Isle of Wight, and parts of Hampshire, were Jutes, were accepted as indicating some real racial distinction. He is rather of the opinion that social conditions favoured a greater unity there which led to a great commercial expansion. This would have admitted of continental influence in the latter part of the sixth century under Ethelbert, when there was a quickening of Germanic culture in central Europe after the irruptions of the Lombards into Italy and their penetration to the Mediterranean. It is at any rate significant that it is only after the first century succeeding the invasion of Britain that the differentiation of Kent from the rest of England and its marked superiority in artistic effort became apparent.

Prof. Åberg's proofs for this and the subsequent chronology, both for Kent and the rest of England, are worked out in great detail in relation to continental evidence. The case is well argued, though perhaps open to question on points of detail. The isolation of Sussex, for example, surely requires the intervention of no racial or social factor, but is explicable on purely geographical lines.

Population Problems of the Pacific. By S. H. Roberts. Pp. xx + 411. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1927.) 21s. net.

WHILE it is generally admitted that the contact of the backward races with the European civilisation has generally proved detrimental to the former,