It is grievous to think that a casual lorry should have put an end to a life of such rare distinction and of constant service to his fellow-men; yet it is well to be able to think that the best was left to the last. Other men might perhaps have done his public work, though not with the same dignity, good judgment and perseverance. But no one can think of a writer and thinker—for many decades back—who could have produced the

"History of Europe". It is practically the history of Western civilization and he had dreamt of it and worked at it during the many toils which took him afield. It is full of learning well-arranged and beautiful to read. If Fisher could have included more science and technology it would be a faultless masterpiece. I know people who make a point of reading some of it every day.

F. S. MARVIN.

STEPS TO AN ISLAND

The Way to an Island

By R. M. Lockley. (Travellers' Tales.) Pp. xi+208+16 plates. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1941.) 7s. 6d. net.

R. M. LOCKLEY has written a number of books dealing with natural history and life on lonely islands, but he has never written a better book than this. I do not mean that there is a greater wealth of accurate observation in this book: I refer rather to the style. The English is admirable; it is simple and direct, very vivid and holding the reader's attention from first page to last. It is indeed a book worthy of the most celebrated masters of modern English prose—Masefield would surely read it with pleasure.

Perhaps, although Mr. Lockley has already written so much on his bird-haunted isle of Skokholm, one could wish that more of this book were devoted to his life on that island. But, as the author says, he has described that life in other books and this work deals with his earlier life—his school days, his intense love of Nature, his dream of owning an island somewhere between Lundy and North Rona, his setbacks and the final fulfilment of his dream.

His description of hearing as a boy the wood warbler's song is admirable (p. 65):

"'See-ee-ee -ee -ee-ee-ee!' cried the wood-warbler in his vibrating voice, and his whole body shivered with delight. A million leaves in the tops of the trees swayed in a rustling chorus which swamped the last sighing notes of the singer. Yes, yes, this is the time we dreamed of in the long wait and coolness of winter, the time of contentment and friendliness and fullest perfection. And with my heart full of a rare joy I waited for the three bell-like notes which concluded the wood warbler's song. They seemed to round off that astonishing magic madrigal by giving utterance to the sadness of replete happiness."

Of his first spring on Skokholm—he had passed the winter in hard work repairing the one house on the island—and his difficulties with the garden

the author gives an arresting description. Of the garden he writes (p. 184):

"The garden gave me pleasure and anxious moments by turns. Something like a ton of bracken and nettle and blackberry roots had been removed and burnt, and by degrees I had planted the rich loam with currant and gooseberry cuttings, broad beans, peas, shallots, early potatoes, parsnips, and so on. But rabbits had found a way in more than once, and I had lost some cabbages I had put down. Then with the first mild weather thousands of snails crept from the cracks between the stones in the herring-bone patterned hedge wall. The snails found my tender young stuff excellent after the years of grazing on tough bracken, nettle, and weed. I collected them by the bucketful every evening, and threw them into the sea. I had no help from the birds. All the thrushes had left the island with the coming of spring, and the single blackbird and his mate took no interest in snails."

But success crowned his efforts (p. 188):

"How the plants grew! The marrow-stem kale shot up and opened leaves like miniature banana palms. The corn grew shoulder high. The potatoes were huge. The lines of blue chicory and yellow dandelion gave this field-garden a gay look. The wild rabbits came out every afternoon and inspected the garden from without the wire-netting fence."

From Skokholm the author and his wife sailed out to, and lived for a day or two upon, the still more lonely and remote ocean isle of Grassholm, accessible only in very fine weather when the ocean swell is at rest. Here they watched the gannets at their nesting colony, observed the habits of the grey seals, and slept on the long grass on the east (and comparatively sheltered) side of the island where they could see, across the gannet-haunted miles of ocean, their own island of Skokholm rise on the eastern horizon.

Truly, this is a book to take the thoughts off these grim days of strife, and transport the spirit to admirable and lovely things in the serene world of Nature.

SETON GORDON.