Spengler Abridgement Helpful to Students - A book review by Professor Carroll Quigley

a review by Carroll Quigley in The Washington Sunday Star, August 2, 1962,

of a book:

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST,

by Oswald Spengler, abridged by Helmut Werner and Arthur Helps.


"Spengler Abridgement Helpful to Students"

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST.

By Oswald Spengler, abridged by Helmut Werner and Arthur Helps.

(Alfred A. Knopf; $6.95.)

The two-volume German edition of this world-famous book appeared 1918-1922 and the English version, from Knopf, in 1926-28. It was a sensation among the intelligentsia from its first appearance and, after thirty years, still sells, in the two-volume edition, thousands of copies a year. Now, a generation later, it is abridged for the less patient reader.

In this case, as in Somervell’s two-volume abridgment of Toynbee’s nine volumes on this same subject, a long-winded or obscure author (as both these writers are) is frequently improved by abridgment.

This is notably true in the present case, where the text as printed is Spengler’s, but repetitive and irrelevant sections have been excised. These are bridged, where necessary, by explanatory passages written by Werner and distinguished from the original by appearing in italics printed within brackets. The result is a volume of considerable value, not perhaps to the student of Spengler but to the student of the intellectual outlook of the early twentieth century, especially in Germany.

As an explanation of how societies evolve and perish Spengler’s work has little merit. It is too subjective, lopsided, and personal. But as an example of the thinking which appears in a mature civilization in crisis, it is of great value. From this point of view, the present abridgment is more convenient by far than the original.

The violence of Spengler’s pessimism and especially his rejection of the real values of Western civilization (such as moderation, rationality, pluralism, humanitarianism, social cooperation) are of great
symptomatic value in any diagnosis of the background of Nazism or of the general impulse to irrational activism and tribal solidarity which came so close to destroying our civilization in the generation which read the original version of this work.

Thus its value remains for the modern reader, and Alfred Knopf, as he invariably does, has given us a beautiful volume, enhanced by introductions and an excellent index.

—Carroll Quigley

Please email the editors (editors@carrollquigley.net) with corrections, questions, or if you have other works by Professor Quigley you would like to see posted.

IT Consulting  |  AVAREN.COM  |  Network Security

AVAREN INC is a Dallas-Fort Worth IT solutions company.