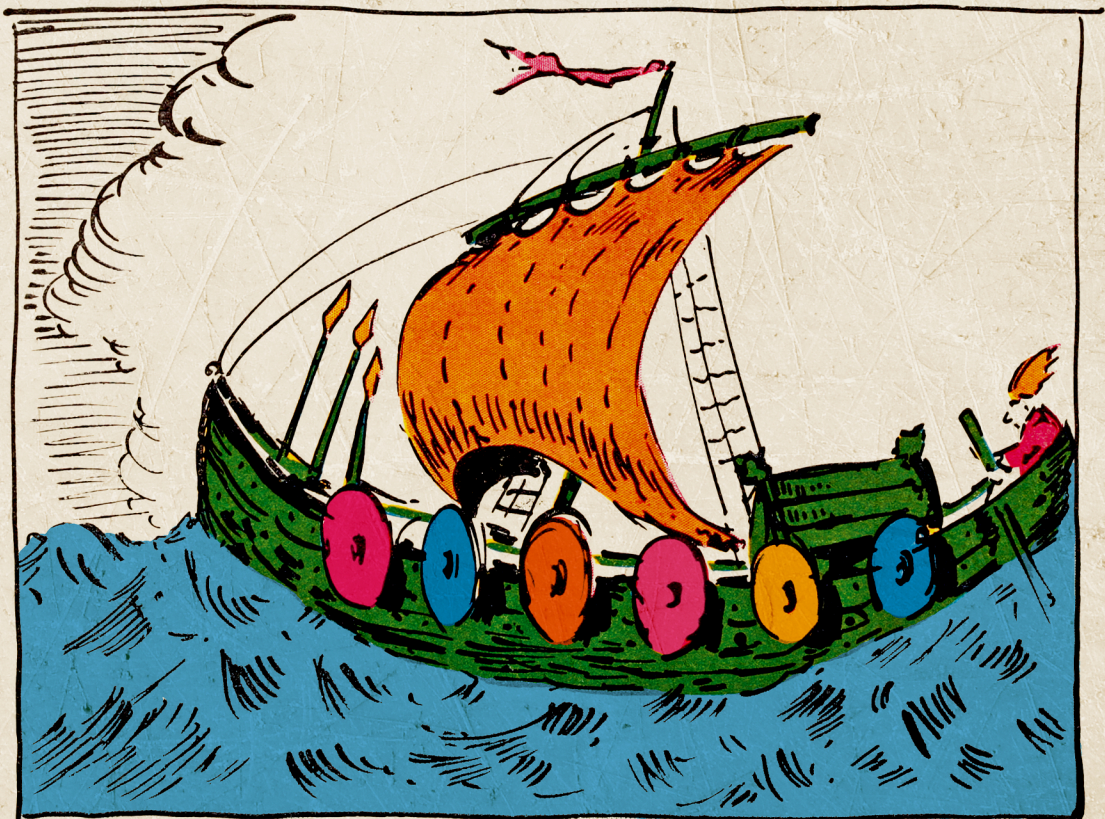


A Short
HISTORY
of
DISCOVERY

*Discover the thrilling stories
of ancient mariners, Vikings, and explorers
who revealed new lands and horizons*



HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

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A Short History of Discovery

*Being an Account of the Earliest
Navigators and the Discovery of*

America

by

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON



Foreword

TO all grown-ups:

This little book is a historical appetizer. It does not intend to give children all the facts about all the events of all the earliest discoveries of Greenland, Iceland, and America. It merely says, “Dear Children: History is the most fascinating, entertaining, and instructive of arts. It tells us of men of great courage and people who knew how to die for their convictions. It shows us how very difficult it is to achieve anything in this world and how we have to work for everything we want to accomplish. And it teaches us that our own little worries are mere trifles compared to the discouragement which other men and women have suffered and have overcome without assistance from the outside.”

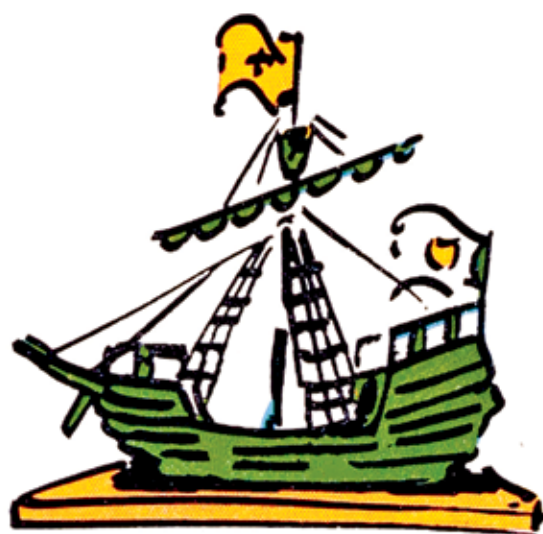
Once the child understands that history does not consist of the heterogeneous dates and the stereotyped patriotic deeds of the average textbook, he may take to reading history for the fun of it. He may acquire a taste for a pastime as valuable as playing the piano or studying poetry. There is nothing practical about history, and the new school of pedagogues who expect to distill culture out of plumbing and boilermaking may succeed in excluding history from the school curriculum. A great many historians help this process along by turning history into a sacred substance administered to the masses in large but indigestible doses. They are like cooks who recite chapters from a cookbook rather than boil us a palatable pudding. The pudding, of course, has to be based upon certain definite principles of culinary science. But when it is brought to the table as a very evident combination of a little flour, some butter, eggs, raisins, and cinnamon, we politely swallow a few spoonfuls, say “No, thank you!” to the offer of a second helping, and hasten to a better restaurant.

I do not want to get my metaphors mixed; therefore, I shall ask somebody to let me have a match and begin with my story.

Cornell University
16 January, 1917

Hendrik Willem van Loon

A SHORT HISTORY
OF
DISCOVERY
FROM
THE EARLIEST TIMES
TO
THE FOUNDING OF COLONIES



ON
THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

DRAWN WITH

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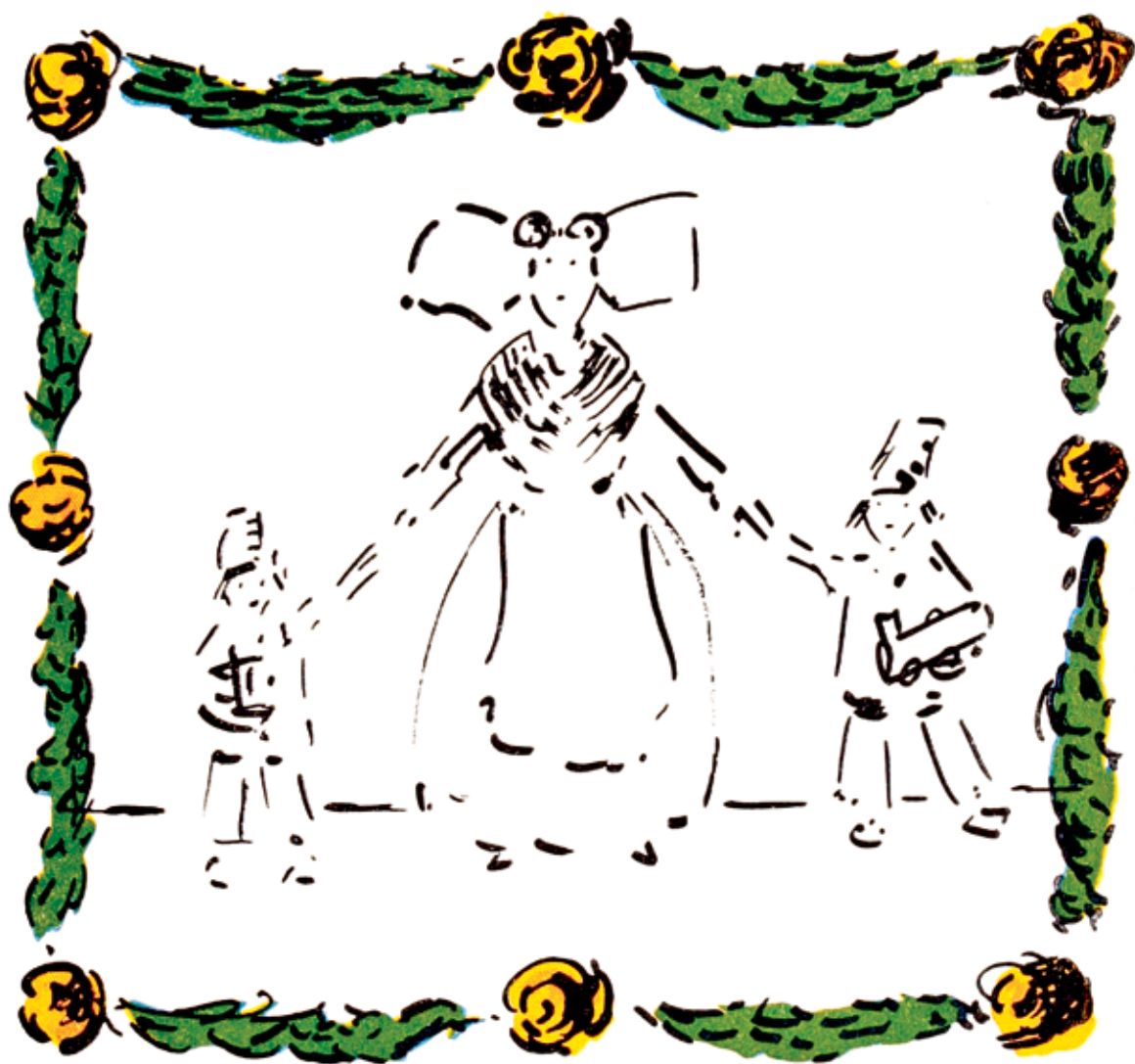


BY

Hendrik Willem van Loon.

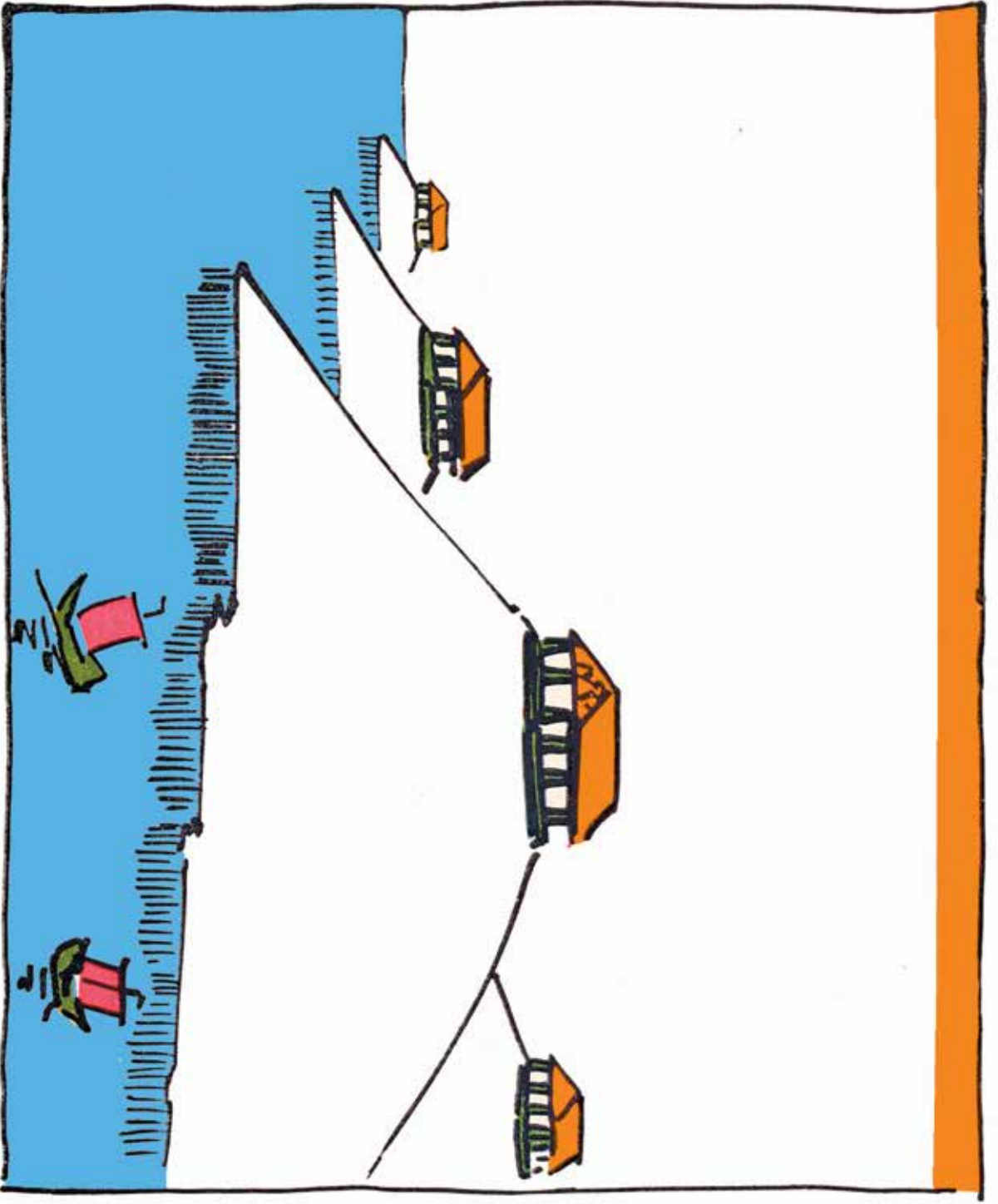
AND
DEDICATED

To



Once upon a time, there was a people called the Greeks. They lived in a beautiful land of sunshine and temples.

ONCE UPON a time, many, many years ago, there lived a people called the Greeks. They inhabited a small and very rocky peninsula and a number of islands. A peninsula is a piece of land surrounded on all sides but one by water. It has a very long coastline and therefore offers a beautiful chance for navigation. The Greeks soon learned how to manage small boats. With these, they sailed all over the eastern part of the Mediterranean and built cities and villages on the many small and rocky islands of the Aegean Sea. They were out in the open most of the time and learned at a very early age how to handle arms and protect themselves against foreign enemies. Time and again, the mighty empire of the Persians tried to conquer this little corner of the world, but all attacks ended in defeat. From all parts of Greece, on land and by means of their quick-sailing vessels, the Greeks would rush to the threatened spot and would stop the invader, often at the sacrifice of every single man who had gone forth to defend the common fatherland.



*They were great philosophers and
mathematicians*

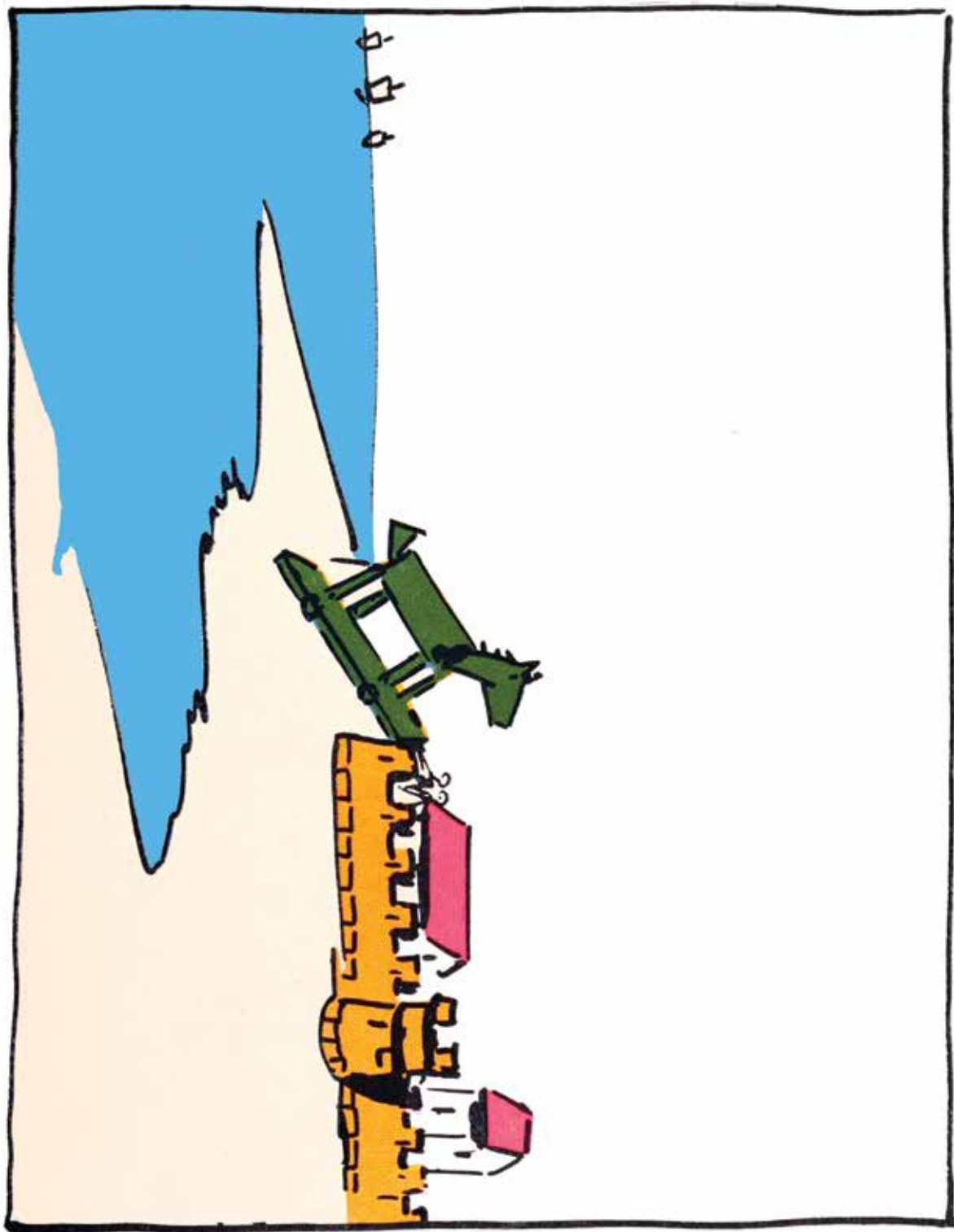
WHEN THERE was no war, the Greeks used to spend their time in commerce, and soon they were quite well-to-do. Many people could then afford to buy slaves and let them work for them. We don't buy slaves nowadays, but we buy shares in large factories, and they work for us (if we have any) just as the little slaves worked for their Greek masters. When all is said and done, however, the Greeks of two thousand years ago knew better than we do how to use their leisure hours and days. They did not believe in too much pleasure. According to the Greeks, pleasure should be like sunshine. We appreciate the light of the sun part of the time, but we are also grateful for a little shade. Otherwise, life would be too monotonous.

The Greeks insisted that every man should spend some effort on the development of his brain. By dint of practice, they learned to perform a very difficult task — they learned how to reason in a logical fashion. Such reasoning is really at the basis of our table of multiplications and all other mathematical problems. The Greeks were great mathematicians, and by applying the rule of three to all problems of life, they became very wonderful philosophers. Even today, after almost twenty centuries, we have to go back to the original Greek books to learn how to think. And some of us never learn it at all.



*They navigated the sea, until they reached
the famous city of Troy*

All beginnings are difficult. Take this question of navigation. It is very easy for us, with strong steel ships, powerful engines, and correct compasses, to find our way across the turbulent ocean. But the Greeks, whose ships were much smaller than our modern ferryboats and who had no compass and must steer by the information given by the stars, thought they had performed a great and glorious feat when they managed to cross the Aegean Sea and attack the town of Troy. The Trojan War in itself is not so very important. The son of the King of Troy had run away with the wife of the Greek King Menelaus. We might never have heard of this affair (which would have been just as well) if it had not been for a certain poet by the name of Homer, who wrote such a fine story about it that we read it today for the sheer pleasure of its delicate literary expression. Homer tells us how the Greeks laid siege to Troy for years and years and years. But the walls of Troy were high and the Trojans sat happily at home while the poor Greeks raged in anger and froze in the cold breezes of the inhospitable shore. Finally the clever Greeks hit upon an idea. They built a large wooden horse and filled it with soldiers, just as we fill large boxes that look like pumpkins with candy. Then the Greeks sailed away. The curious Trojans saw the horse, hoisted it into their city and thought that it was a fine joke. But when the Greek soldiers crept out of the horse at night it was no longer a joke at all.

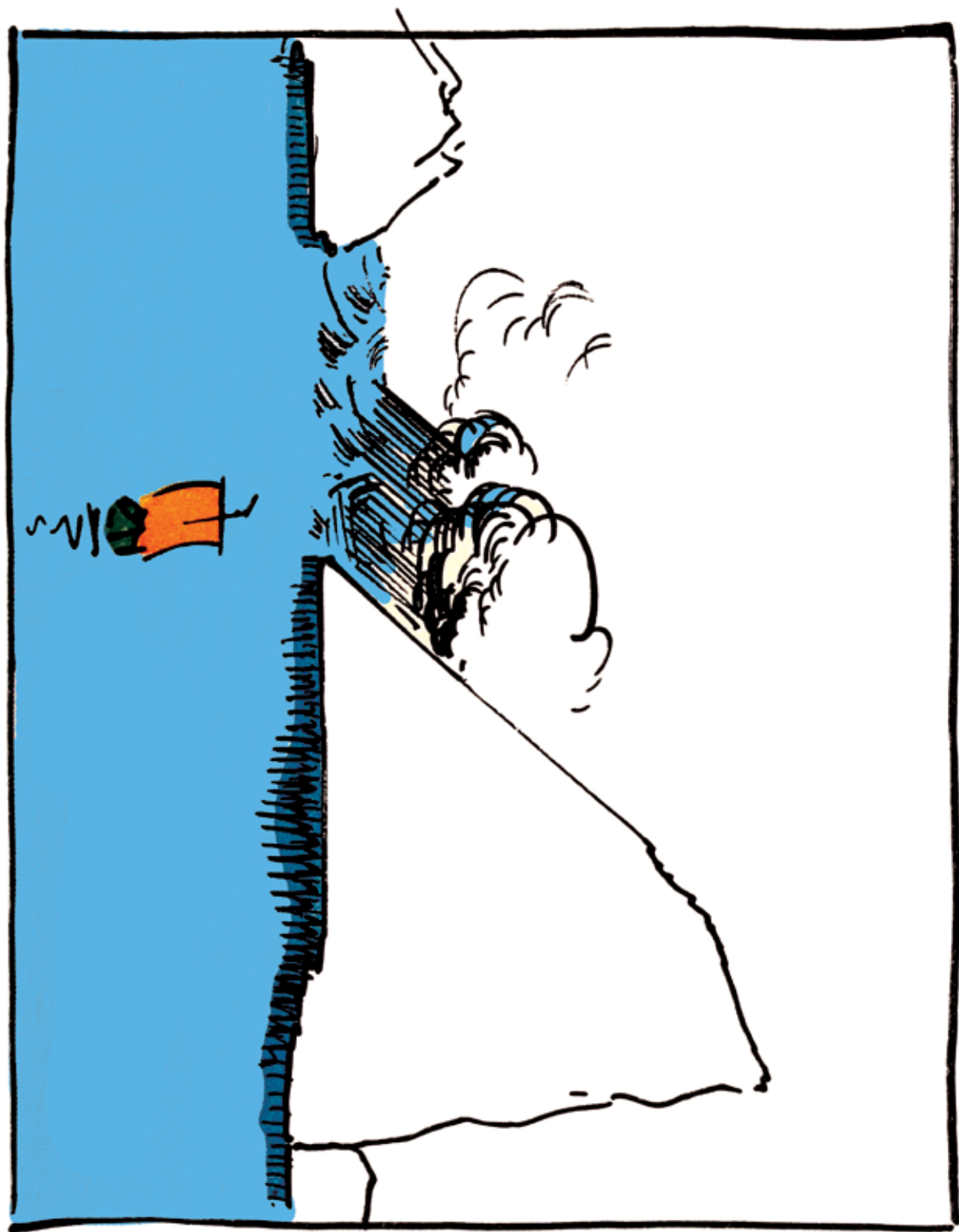


Afterwards the Greeks sailed across the Mediterranean

THIS WAS by no means the only adventure of the Greek warriors. Perhaps, if you ask your Papa for more books of this sort, I shall write one about old Hellas.

This time I must talk only about the old and new navigators. Very slowly and very carefully, the Greeks explored every nook and corner of the Mediterranean, the Sea of Marmora, and the distant Black Sea. At last, after several centuries of adventurous voyages, they reached the straits which we now call the Straits of Gibraltar.

You ask a question: “Did they ever pass through the straits and get into the Atlantic?” and I answer, “No!” but I could not precisely tell you why not. The Phoenicians, many years before, had ventured into the Atlantic to sail to Wales and buy tin, necessary for their bronze weapons. The Greeks, less eager for tin, were afraid of this vast stretch of water, where it was always stormy, cold, and foggy. Their skippers used to tell each other terrible yarns about great monsters that swallowed whole ships and more nonsense of a similar nature. Finally, they believed their own stories and kept well within the bounds of the Mediterranean. If ever you happen to cross this sea on a stormy day, you will notice that it is quite big enough to provide comfortable sailing space for a few hundred thousand Greeks.

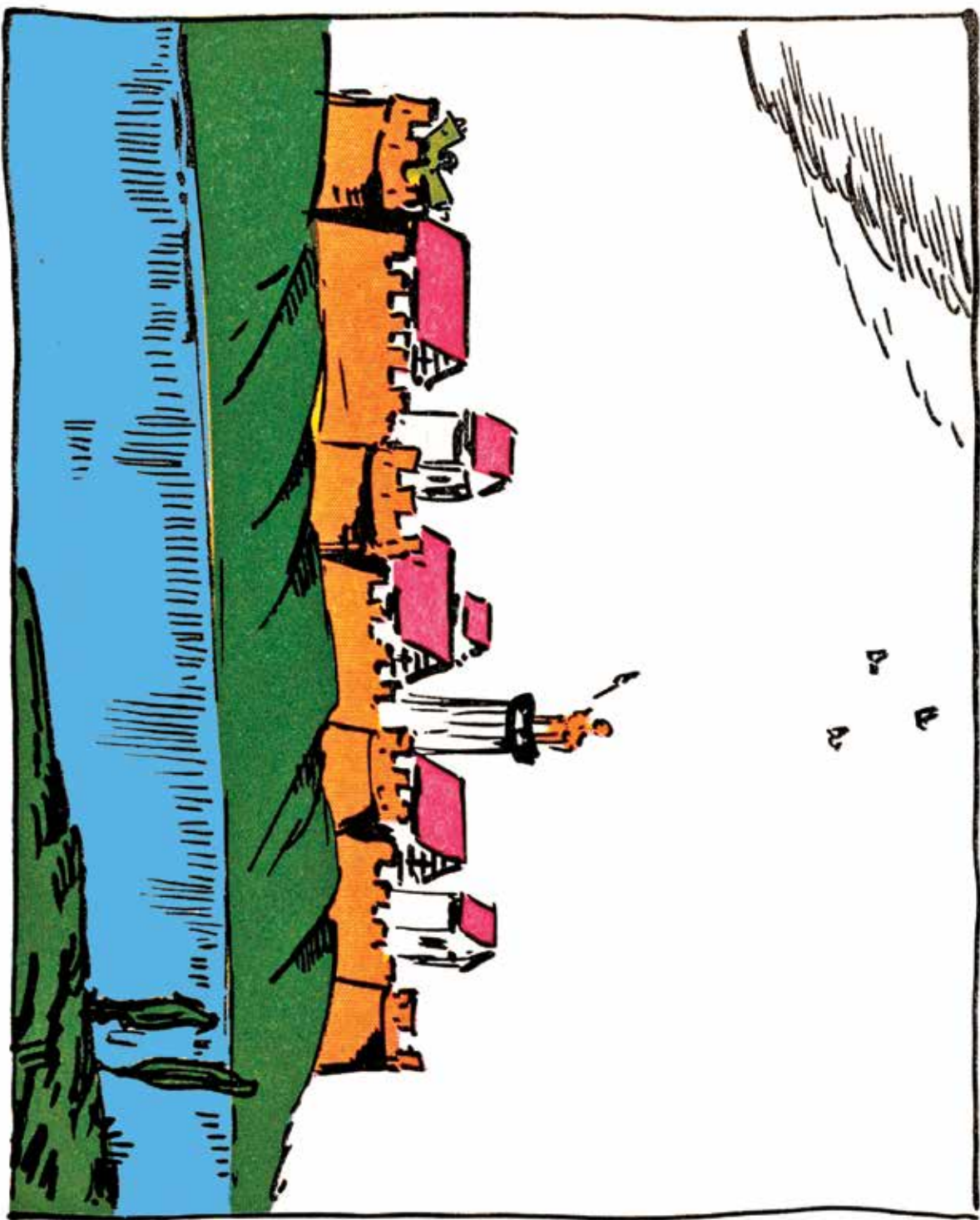


***A little to the West of the Greeks there lived
another people, called the Romans***

THE GREEKS, however, were not the only people who lived, died, wrote poetry, and fought battles in the Mediterranean. They had rivals. We call these rivals the Romans. You must have seen many Romans in your day. They no longer conquer the world, as their ancestors did, but they do very useful work on railroad tracks and with pushcarts filled with bananas and peanuts. More than two thousand years ago (for such is the way of the world and we all have our ups and downs), the Romans were the masters of all that part of Europe, Asia, and Africa which went by the name of “the civilized world.” Originally, they were a small tribe of shepherds who lived in a little city built upon seven low hills, on the banks of a muddy little stream called the Tiber.

The Romans, once they had formed a state and had begun to gobble up the territory of their neighbors, showed very different characteristics from the Greeks. They did not care much for fine literature, noble architecture, or melodious music. They hired Greeks to build temples, poetize, and play the flute for them, just as we import foreign opera singers, piano virtuosi, acrobats, and school teachers to train our young while we are busy constructing bridges, powder houses, subaquatic tunnels, and skyscrapers.

No, the great virtue of the Roman was his aptitude for legal reasoning and managing the affairs of his neighbors much better than the neighbors ever could hope to do themselves.

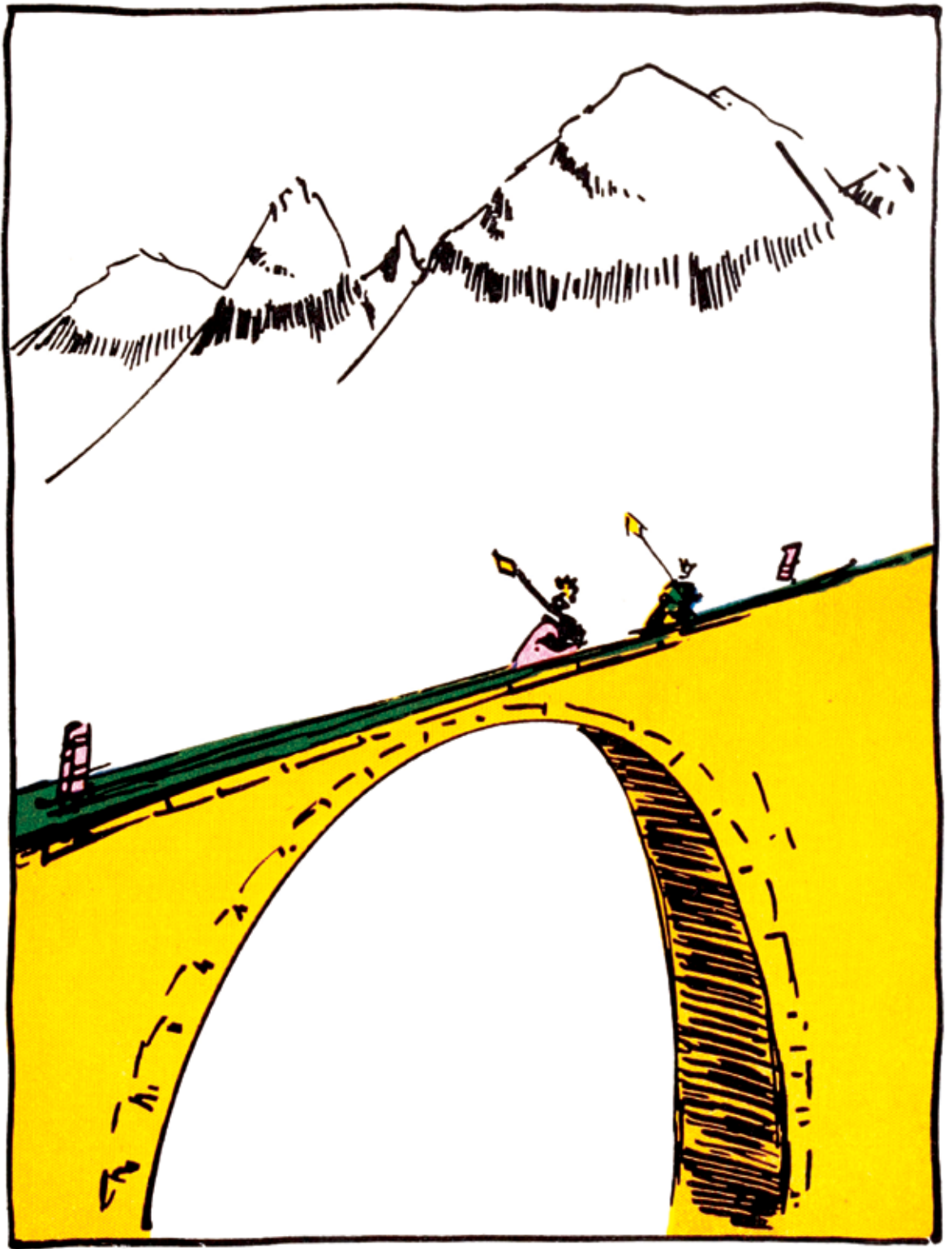


*They were great soldiers and built roads and
bridges all over Europe*

THEIR soldiers and their civil administrators marched east, west, south, and north and founded an empire which, under one name or another, survived until the days of your own great-grandfather and long after President Washington died.

Wherever you go in Europe today, you will find roads built by the Romans, bridges across wide Alpine chasms built by the Romans, and cities along the banks of mighty rivers built by the Romans. I mean the cities, for the Romans, although they dug many canals, never attempted to dig a river. Across these bridges, along these roads, and past those cities marched the legions of the mighty town which was the Mistress of all the World, sending her viceroys to rule her possessions from the distant hills of Palestine to the wooded plains of North Germany.

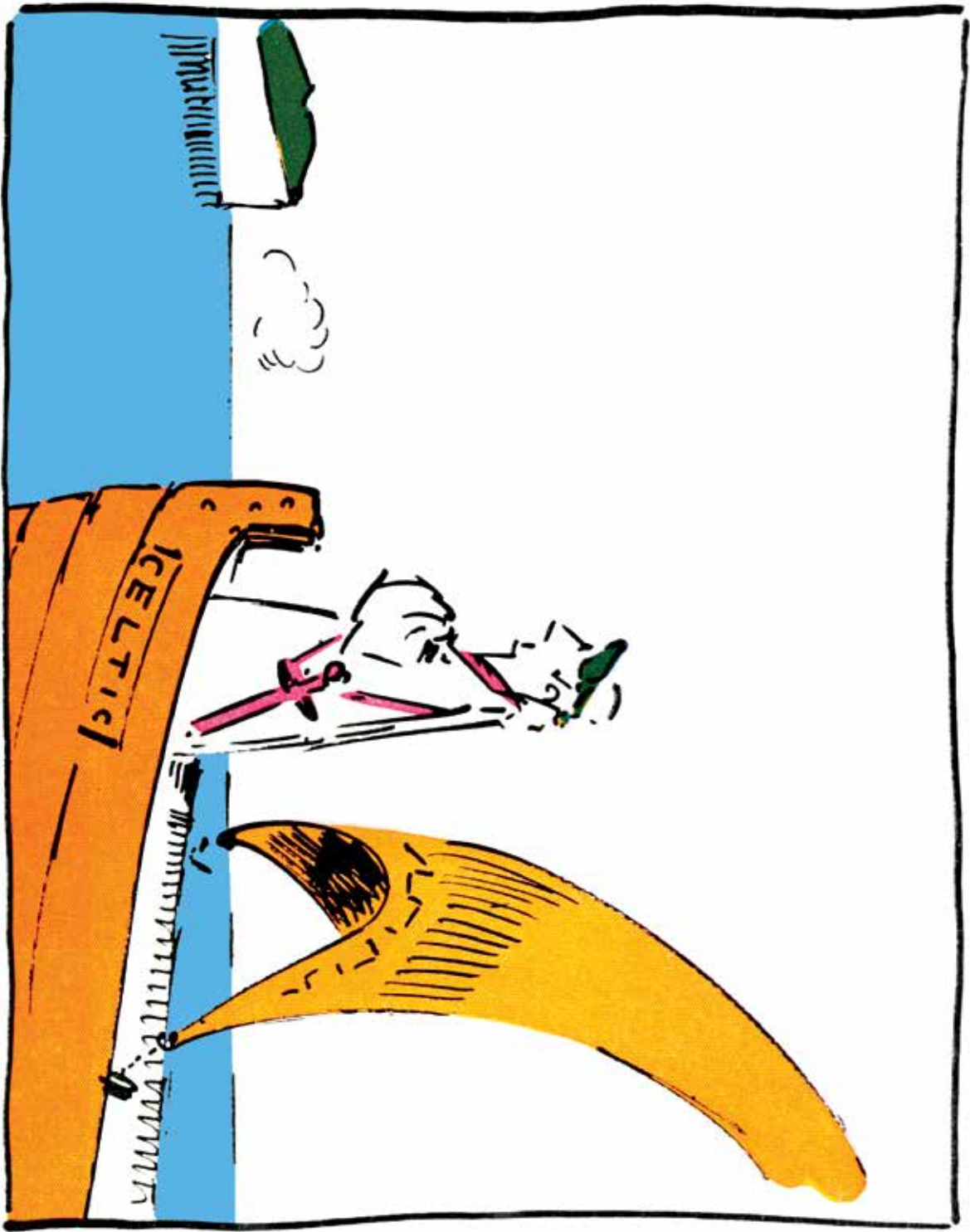
Within this wide domain, there was peace and quiet. There were no brigands or robbers, for the Romans not only knew how to make laws but also understood the rare art of making people obey them.



*One of their generals even crossed the
Channel and discovered England*

Finally, having reached the ultimate borders of the European continent, the Romans decided to explore the shores of the pretty green island they could see from the walls of their castles in France. Hence, one of their generals, famous for his ability to lead expeditionary armies through wild regions inhabited by savage Teutons, built a fleet and landed in England. The name of this general was Caius Julius Caesar. He crossed the British Channel in the year 50 B.C.

He marched through Kent, discovered the River Thames, and pushed as far as Essex. Then he went back to Europe and eventually to Rome. He came to a very sad end. Like many popular men before him, he was very ambitious and wanted to become Emperor of all the vast Roman domains. But those who cared more for civic righteousness than for outward glory decided to prevent this plan, and they killed Caesar with the thrust of many daggers. His name survives. Whenever somebody rules a great many lands, we say that he is “a Kaiser.” The Romans pronounced the C as a K, and when we talk about the Kaiser of Germany or Russia or China, we really mean somebody who is like the old Roman Caesar.



CELTIC

WINDMILLS

***The Romans constructed many strong towers
and many well-fortified cities***

AS FOR the Roman methods of civil and military administration, they were simplicity itself. When the Roman armies entered a new country, they looked for a convenient hill and on top of it, they built a fine, strong, and impregnable tower. The poor Franks, Gauls, Britons, and Teutons who lived around this tower could not hope to destroy it with their weak arrows and slingshots. So they made the best of a fairly comfortable bargain. They paid the Romans a certain amount of tribute every year in the form of cowhides (for soldiers' shoes), honey (which the people used before the invention of sugar), and things the armies could eat and drink. In return for their board and lodging, the Roman general administered the conquered territory in an exemplary fashion.

Of course, among so many viceroys there were a few bad men who made use of their strong position among a weak people to fill their own pockets. But the main average of Roman governors was quite good. They were Mayor and Board of Aldermen and Chief of Police and Bureau of Registration and Commissioner of Weights and Measures, all in one. They worked hard to give all the people a reasonable chance to live a quiet and decent life, and in this they succeeded very well for many centuries.

