

hibit an intellectual octane content too rich for easy assimilation, and their impact is nil or near it.

All this is by way of expressing applause, admiration, and a few regrets at the emergence of Vol. I, No. 1, of a new quarterly: *MODERN AGE, a Conservative Review*. It trots hopefully before the public, handsomely designed, on the strength of Editor Russell Kirk's conviction that "the best medium for expressing considered judgments still is the serious journal." He emphasizes that by this, "we do not mean a dull and pompous review, but rather a magazine which endeavors to reach the minds of men who think of something more than the appetites of the hour."

Our regrets are simply that so few such men exist these days. If ours were a less frenetic society, geared to a slower pace, a host of thoughtful readers would come forward to subscribe to Mr. Kirk's review. He is no right-wing fanatic, yelling shrilly on topical themes. He is a scholar, a philosopher, a thinker, gifted with an easy style of writing and an insatiable eagerness for intelligent debate. He should be able to attract to his quarterly the best conservative writers of this generation. (Richard M. Weaver has a superlative lead article in the first issue.) The problem is one of finding an audience with time to listen, time to reflect.

Our best wishes go with Mr. Kirk in his endeavor; a check for \$3, covering a year's subscription, is on the way to 64 East Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4. He needs, he says in an editor's note, a minimum of 8,000 to 10,000 subscribers in order to survive. Surely there must be many Virginians, interested in having their instinctive conservatism expounded and defended, who might take a flier. And if there are not 8,000 to 10,000 thinking conservative readers in the Republic, the Republic, no less than *MODERN AGE*, soon or late will cave in.

—RICHMOND NEWS LEADER  
*Richmond, Virginia*

## *Comments on Robert Dudley French*

"Dear Mr. Kirk: In the first issue of your excellent review, Mr. Geoffrey Wagner writes critically of Mr. Robert Dudley French's *A Chaucer Handbook*. As a student of Mr. French who took what I think was his last course on Chaucer before his retirement (he died shortly thereafter), I would like to register both an assent and a defense.

"First I think your readers should know what Mr. French was like as a man. He was short, regularly wearing suits of brown, or oxford gray; with vest. He had a squat, grizzled head with eyes that mirrored both kindness and scholarly attainment. He was a man who loved Chaucer, as a person and as a protean genius, and a man who successfully defied the "new criticism" character of much of Yale's English Department by insisting on an historical appreciation of Chaucer as intrinsic to his art. It was in some of his historical interpretations that Mr. French was mistaken; not in his critical appreciation, nor in his heart.

"Mr. French greeted us the first morning of class with a stony, cherubic face (yes, he managed both simultaneously). He passed out single pages of white paper. He said solemnly, "Gentlemen, this is an examination on the assignment I had posted, which I am sure all of you assiduously completed." Then he put the following questions on the blackboard: 1. What color hair did Chaucer have? 2. What did he ride between his government office and his home? Who was his famous patron, and what was his relationship? How did he come to write the *Canterbury Tales*? And so on.

"The gasp of consternation was general. We were accustomed to at least one day's grace at the beginning of the year, where we listened to a lecture giving the anatomy and motive of the course. It would

have been like walking into Paul Weiss' seminar on Cosmology and being asked for an exegesis of his *Reality*.

"Mr. French had the prefects gather test papers. He took them, neatly squared the pile, and tore them up. He said, 'Gentlemen, that is the last quiz you will be subjected to in this course.'

"The man was a gentleman.

"Above all, he was an *amateur*. He imbued the classroom with his devotion to his subject. He did not run a 'gut' course. Daily papers were required, and woe to the facile mind that depended on his nimble wits to slide him through. Not only sound analysis was demanded in these papers, but collateral reading and a scholarly approach. One simply cannot bluff one's way through some 150 themes in which economy is enforced. It is easier by far to pad out a paper of 1,500 words than to concentrate thought and research into a tight 500 words. Mr. French realized that forcing the student to formulate his thoughts and knowledge in a written piece was the way to learn literature, and to grow in the learning of it, and he excited interest in a genius who does not immediately command the attention of the modern.

"But he had his faults. He lectured one day on the Marian Myth, or Marian Idolatry, or something of the like. I took issue with him, and I wrote him what I'm sure now was an intemperate, angry, youthful letter, telling him I did not expect to have my devotions insulted in his course.

One of his readers returned me my letter with a furious comment, saying it was unworthy of Professor French's attention, and that it was designed only to provoke attention.

"I took the letter, and the reader's answer, to Mr. French in person. He greeted me with his usual courtesy. He read both, shaking his head a little sadly and saying of his reader, 'It was from personal devotion that he wrote this, and I think we can forgive him, can't we?' He then went on to say that my letter obviously sprang from a similar personal devotion, and that he valued it for that. He apologized, this scholar in the mellow afternoon of his career, apologized to me, his student, saying gently that he had not intended insult, that he had only tried to explain what had been at one time—in some respects—an excessive emotionalism. Our relations remained cordial throughout the year; I learned from Mr. French not only a lot about Chaucer, but the manliness of humility.

"Mr. French did tend to taint his historical evaluations with the determinism of his era. But he did not consciously intend to do this. He was a scholar, and a man of sensibility, and a good person. It remains as his epitaph and as the pathos of the times that he should have been so much captured by what was foreign to his nature."

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## NEWS AND NOTES

FROM TIME TO TIME MODERN AGE will publish news of events, institutions and other matters of interest to its readers.

The New School for Social Research of New York City announces six timely talks by Russell Kirk, editor of MODERN AGE, concerning the "Restoration of Humane Learning and Humane Politics in the Twentieth Century." The talks will be given at the school on Mondays from 8:30 until 10:10 p.m. as follows:

Oct. 28—Norms, conventions and conformity.

Nov. 25—The politics of religious humanism.

Jan. 27—The conservation of norms: Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Feb. 24—The conservation of norms: Paul Elmer More.

Mar. 31—The conservation of norms: T. S. Eliot.

Apr. 28—Ancient norms and modern historians.

The series, including registration fee, requires payment of \$15, with mail registrations accepted at the School, 66 West 12th Street, New York 11, N. Y. Telephone: ORegon 5-2700.

The Sixth International Congress of the European Center of Information and Documentation was held at the Escorial, Spain, June 17-19, 1957. Under the presidency of Archduke Otto von Hapsburg, now a resident of Germany, and with the Marquis de Valdeiglesias of Madrid, as secretary-

general, a distinguished group of European conservatives assembled to discuss the "crisis of the Atlantic World," especially with reference to "European-American misunderstanding." Many members of parliament and/or officials, editors, professors, and others principally from Germany, Spain, France, and Austria, with a few from England and the United States, were in attendance. The presence of Otto and a number of princes, barons, and "landed gentry" gave the conference impression of strong sympathy for monarchist restoration; this was officially denied. The foreign minister of Spain until recent, A. M. Artajo, delivered the main address. Possibly the principal observation to be made concerned the lack of a hearty agreement between the representatives of the various countries as to the reasons for the alleged European-American misunderstanding, and the steps to be taken henceforth. Various French representatives, often to the disapproval of other delegations, delivered rather abusive harangues against the United States and made somewhat wild charges concerning the U. S. role in North Africa and the Middle East. They also denounced what they termed "Islamic fanaticism" and called upon all countries to back them in Africa as the best hope for saving Christian Europe. Prof. Alexander von Randa of Innsbruck, Austria, author of a definitive study of history, in effect took issue with the French position by proclaiming that the interests of the West would best be served by a condition of friendship between Islamic and Christian traditions, both of which stand as bulwarks against the godless forces. Indeed a necessary conclusion is that, in terms of this conference, the common denominators of American and European conservatism have yet to be clearly enunciated. Those interested in further information on this and future Congresses may write: Centro Europeo de Documentacion e Informacion, Esparteros 1, Madrid, Spain.