

Books of Special Interest

The Status of Religion

PROTESTANT EUROPE: ITS CRISIS AND OUTLOOK. By ADOLF KELLER and GEORGE STEWART. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by H. ADYE PRICHARD
Rector, St. Mark's Church, Mt. Kisco

IF one believes that the sanity and civilized progress of mankind depends on religion—as this reviewer does—he will lay down this book with mingled feelings of depression and encouragement. For it deals with the state of organized religion in the great continent of Europe; and deals with it in so comprehensive a manner that little, whether hopeful or despairing, is left unsaid.

It is far more easy to write about the church than about religion. The church can be to a large extent expressed in statistics, and tabulated in columns; religion, being the province of the unseen spiritual life of man, is susceptible of no such analysis. It is not therefore always the case that the state of the church in its visible presence truthfully mirrors the state of religion. Many observers believe, for instance, that the world today is infinitely more under the spell of religion than any mere description of the membership and activity and influence of the church would indicate.

The moral and inspirational and spiritual movements that surge in Europe today outside the pale of any church are perhaps the most encouraging signs of the times. They have a strong hold upon the young; they exist among widespread fraternal and mutual welfare associations; they have an international and universal character. They may force the church, which is not influential in counsels of peace or war, in courts or factories, as it used to be, to a house cleaning which will set in places of honor the things that are to be admired, and relegate the dusty relics of medievalism and tradition to the monkish attics where superstition is more considered than salvation.

The modern churchman is faced with a

very difficult—and essentially serious—problem in proportion. He believes that a vast deal of the integral life of the Christian fellowship, which the Roman Catholic Church has always struggled to preserve, is of inestimable value in keeping a sane sense of the gradual unfolding of God through Jesus Christ in the developing affairs of men; and yet he feels that, as modern scholarship and discovery and science open wider and wider the various doors of man's knowledge, room must be left for an expansion of interpretation and a modification of ancient axioms. Religion no longer can commend itself by dictating to science. Science must be allowed to guide religion—as it will do whether its claim to leadership is acknowledged or not. Therefore there would seem to be a chance, in this new Europe that the war has brought into being,—not for the dominance of the undeviating spirit of traditional Roman Catholicism, nor for the unscientific rationalism of much modern Protestantism—but for a wise synthesis of that faith which keeps what is best in the past with what is glorious in the present.

To such a synthesis it would seem that Europe, perhaps unconsciously, is applying its most developed powers of spiritual discovery. It may be true that in fourteen countries, due to an accumulation of calamities, the Protestant Church is fighting for its life; that everywhere, largely owing to economic conditions, there is a dearth of theological students; that the religious education of children is being hopelessly neglected in one country after another: it may be true, on the other hand, that Roman Catholicism is showing astounding gains, for instance in Germany where "eighty-eight Protestant institutions closed in 1923, while in the five years leading up to that date the Catholic Church opened seven hundred such institutions"—yet it would seem, from all the evidence, that the Protestantism that is threatened is not perhaps a very valuable form of Reformation fruit, and the Catholicism that is growing is not the ironbound type that has appeared from time to time to fetter the imagination of men. It may be that the changing

theological front is working out, between the two, as the writers say is the case in England, a social conscience that emphasizes that the solution of modern civilization lies only in the understanding and acceptance of Christ as a living person, still potent in the lives of men. In this Gospel there is no reason why the best of modern Protestantism and the best of traditional Catholicism should not find themselves in brotherly agreement.

After all there is room for all schools of reverent thought that find their inspiration somewhere in the mind of Jesus. Names should not be powerful to separate, and methods need not lead to division. The Christian faith rests on a spirit, not on a letter.

Many of the aspects of the situation in Europe as discussed in this book form a fascinating and illuminating study. For instance it strikes the imagination to think of little groups of adherents of a National Church cut off entirely from the root of that church by the new alignment of national boundaries as adopted by the League of Nations; to be reminded of the great poverty that makes it well nigh impossible to give their lives solely to culture, under an economic pressure which commands that Europe shall produce; to learn of the great influence of the Y. M. C. A., for example, and the Baptist Church in large sections of Europe. Such information as the sympathetic recital of those facts gives is novel and stimulating to an American reader.

But most of all it is stirring to read of the great desire, deep-seated in the nature of men, and displaying itself even in times of political, social, and economic chaos, to find and preserve a religion. Some of us, perhaps, as our minds turned to Europe, never gave a thought to its spiritual future, so interested were we in debts and boundaries and industries. It is good to know that Europe has set its face towards the morning of promise and is bent on discovering the way of God out of the morass of war. It may be that, when the sun rises, its light may be purer than before because of the mist that has covered its face.

In the South Seas

CANNIBAL NIGHTS. By CAPTAIN H. E. RAABE. New York: Payson & Clarke. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by ARCHIE BINNS

THIS book is not for babes and sucklings, unless they are the variety that strangle serpents while still in the cradle. Captain Raabe was one of these—shanghaied from an American clipper at thirteen, duelling second mate of a blood-stained South Sea trader at fourteen, and later blackbird, follower of the Doubtful Flag and lieutenant to that notorious and epic character of the Islands, Bully Hayes.

"Cannibal Nights" is a true account of Captain Raabe's adventures in the South Seas during the 'seventies and early 'eighties. Possibly the fact that the greater part of the book is taken up with the first voyage suggests that some events have been unconsciously telescoped. But the events themselves, unbelievable as they would sound in fiction, are set down with unmistakable candor and veracity.

Captain Raabe's book will take even the lover of the sensational into deep water; it contains some of the most thrilling passages this reviewer has ever read. At least one cannot be passed by without mention—the one where young Raabe joins the man-eating natives of Guadalcanar in a night attack on the boats of the black-birding *Tinacula*. It is doubtful if anything in fiction could equal that scene for sheer atavism—a white boy among savages in the impenetrable night, acting with them, then thinking and feeling with them—until the magnificent climax of the attack, when the boy Raabe becomes a primeval savage, thirsting for the blood of white men. Read that chapter—and then, if you can, keep from clapping hastily at yourself to see if you have not changed to a naked black!

Not all of the book is so masterfully written; there are some touches that will add nothing for those who do not realize that a man cannot be a seaman without being sentimental at times. But "Cannibal Nights" has no dull pages, and there are a dozen scenes of buccaneering, adventure, and gorgeous comedy anyone of which is worth the price of the book.

As a record of lawless pioneer days in the South Seas, "Cannibal Nights" should take an enduring place; as the most thrilling book this reviewer has read in years it is recommended to every man and woman who is not suffering from anemia—and every bloodthirsty boy who has ever yearned to be a pirate.

Roosevelt

and
the



Caribbean

By Howard C. Hill

Roosevelt's public and private correspondence, copies of his speeches, significant memoranda, engagement books, confidential reports, and personal notes are all deposited in the Library of Congress. Mr. Hill is the third person permitted to examine this material with a view to publication. With this inaccessible and important material at his complete disposal, Mr. Hill has written a new chapter in the story of Roosevelt's negotiations with the Central American countries.

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A Button Book

Books of Special Interest

French Writers

FRENCH STUDIES AND REVIEWS.

By RICHARD ALDINGTON. New York: The Dial Press, 1926.

Reviewed by MERRIAM SHERWOOD

THIS is a collection of articles reprinted from the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Criterion*. They are mild little studies that will tell nothing to those who are special students of French literature. Perhaps the book may call the attention of amateurs to one or more forgotten writers—especially those of the medieval period. Yet it can hardly encourage intimate acquaintance, for there is an unnecessary aridity about it. In one essay Mr. Aldington remarks that "the grave defect of this set of satirists is flatness"—a criticism that has to be applied to the present book. It is a very bookish book indeed, but without the saving graces of an original point of view and solid information. The thoughts are scant enough and the information, such as it is, might as well be gotten elsewhere.

The first third of the book is made up of six reviews of recent scholarly studies or critical editions of a number of medieval French texts. One wonders just what purpose Mr. Aldington had in mind in writing these reviews. What class of readers did he expect to interest? Scholars certainly would go to the learned periodicals for expert criticism. Mr. Aldington is simply an unusually well-read amateur of Old French. He would be peculiarly well qualified to interest the general educated public in this older period, for which he seems to have a very real enthusiasm. Yet his reviews are no better calculated to attract the general reader than the scholar. Mr. Aldington quotes liberally from his Old French texts. He does this without translating. There might be some excuse for such a procedure if one were discussing a modern French work. But Old French is not modern French and is far from being intelligible to anyone—even a Frenchman—who has not made a special study of it. Mr. Aldington's reviews fall flat. Even his style has a deadening effect, except in the occurrence, here and there, of an aptly turned phrase.

Perhaps an exception might be made, to some extent, in regard to the essay on François Villon. His estimate of this impudent, lovable, self-centered bad boy of fifteenth-century Paris is very just and quite refreshing after the maudlin eulogies one is accustomed to hear.

The larger section of the book deals with the modern period. The essay on "Characters and Portraits" is one of the least unsatisfactory here. It consists of an outline history of the "character study"—but an outline so thinly drawn that the contours do not come out very clearly. For all that appears we can find neither support nor disproof for Mr. Aldington's final statement that Mr. Lytton Strachey is a brilliant master of the "portrait biography."

Sometimes, as in the essay on "The Youth of M. de Florian," one is a bit stimulated by Mr. Aldington's lack of orientation. He conceives that those who wrote admiring descriptions of rustic simplicity and who yet could not live away from Paris represent the class of "apparently inconsistent characters so frequent in the second half of the eighteenth century, who, in a time of confusion and transition, are pulled this way and that by the conflicting forces of their age." Nothing is more easy to say, but bucolic literature has flourished in many epochs and a little thought about it makes one incline towards another version of Florian's state of mind: he was not "pulled this way and that," perhaps, but was just doing what has always been done—living in the city and writing about the country. We are free to doubt very much, by the way, that people were particularly "inconsistent" in the second half of the eighteenth century. Mr. Aldington is inclined to offer his opinions as facts, which is a poor method where history is involved.

Another example of his substitution of captivating opinion for historical truth is his identification of Charlie Chaplin with the Harlequin of Italian comedy. His theory of the *commedia dell'arte* is the one now made banal by cynics who find in this quaint slap-stick rogue the embodiment of human wisdom, the unlearned Democritus who is yet "wise" enough to laugh at the learned and at human effort in general. No doubt Charlie Chaplin is a wise man,

too. But he moves in a very realistic world, whereas Harlequin lives through fantastic centuries of convention; probably he never had a social status more befitting him or giving him a better opportunity to win our admiration and affection than that which he occupies today on the rattling stages of Punch-and-Judy shows. It would be right enough to say that Charlie Chaplin serves humanity today somewhat as Harlequin once did. But "other times, other customs"; an identification of the two is flimsy history and betrays a very curious substitute for philosophy. It represents perfectly the long misused method of tracing origins and influences by identification rather than by analogy.

One essay—that on Scarron—is much better; one could wish it longer than it is. Another, about M. de Navenne's description of the Farnese Palace, carries with it an authentic atmosphere of the Rome that was before the Piedmontese modernizers modernized it. A few lines on Plessys in "Four Modern Poets" might have become a very fine essay. In another on Mérimée he finds one of the happiest of phrases when he describes a generation as "deafened by the advice of Victor Hugo."

One knows why the reviews were written; and, although far from the best in their genre, they probably served their purpose. It is not so easy to see why they have been reprinted between cloth covers.

Ritual and Myth

CELTIC MYTH AND ARTHURIAN MYTHOLOGY. By ROGER SHERMAN LOOMIS. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927. \$6.

Reviewed by GORDON HALL GEROULD
Princeton University

COMPARATIVE mythology is always a dangerous wilderness in which to wander. The trails are singularly confused, and the trees look so much alike that intrepid wayfarers often mistake resemblance for identity. There are queer formations, too. Anyone with half a mind to it can find solar heroes and vegetable gods behind every bush. The moral is that no scholar ought to venture into the forest unless he is both tough-minded and hard-headed. Erudition will not save him.

Learning, and enthusiasm, and an agreeable style have not saved the author of this volume from writing what is rather a work of imagination than of scholarship. Mr. Loomis can believe, one fears, anything he wishes to believe. He lacks the power of seeing things in the dry, clear light of commonsense, and he is therefore a peculiarly dangerous guide. His fundamental error is the notion that French and German romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had in mind and embodied in their fiction an amazingly complicated set of myths derived from Celtic heathendom: stories so many centuries buried in the past that—on his own showing—neither Bretons nor Welsh nor Irish had preserved them distinctly. He asks us to believe that foreigners, bent chiefly as we know on amusing court ladies, somehow managed to make these blurred memories of the past so clear that scholars in the twentieth century may hope to reconstruct from them both the ritual and the myth of the British Isles as they were when Caesar came. Fatuity could go no farther.

It is an incidental difficulty of such attempts, in which Mr. Loomis is merely bolder and less cautious than most of his coworkers, that the conjecture of one chapter must become the accepted fact of the next, and that one strained etymology must lead to another until half a dozen heroes are "equated" with an unknown god. That medieval fiction-writers ever let imagination range is quite forgotten. This is not the place in which to point out in detail the defects of the volume under review. The author has gathered together a great deal of interesting material and made various conjectures that deserve further study; but he is wholly uncritical in method and about certain matters displays rather painful ignorance. The layman will scarcely be tempted to read his book, and the scholar must read it with extreme caution. The Arthurian sculptures at Modena, for example, with which the whole argument begins, cannot yet be safely dated. Until archaeologists have ceased dogmatic assertion about them and have shown definite evidence for so early a date as 1100, students of literature will do well to avoid using them as the basis for guesses of their own.

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