

In the preface to the "Fables," Dryden justifies what he has done:

How few are there who can read Chaucer, so as to understand him perfectly! And if imperfectly, then with less profit and no pleasure. 'Tis not for the use of some old Saxon friends that I have taken these pains with him: let them neglect my version, because they have no need of it. I made it for their sakes who understand sense and poetry as well as they, when that poetry and sense is put into words which they understand.

Mr. Hill's contention is almost exactly the same:

A Chaucer in modern verse, whatever its defects, at least provides accessibility. And I have felt that even with those who have read Chaucer widely (I naturally exclude Chaucerian scholars), he has too often been seen in a blurred and fragmentary fashion.

No one can deny that between Chaucer and the understanding of the modern reader who is not a special scholar there is fixed a very considerable gulf. Curiously enough, the barrier was more formidable in the days of Dryden than it is today. Many of Chaucer's words and phrases which had become completely obsolete two hundred years ago have come back into the vocabulary of modern poetry through the mediation of such writers as Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson, and William Morris. It was not till the publication in 1175 of Tyrwhitt's edition of the "Canterbury Tales" with its revelation of the structure of Chaucer's language, that Chaucer was recognized as a metrist no less concerned with the musical finesse of his lines than was Pope himself. To Dryden his verse seemed to have only "the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune."

But though the gulf which separates us from Chaucer has somewhat narrowed, it is still unluckily true that a really adequate mastery of him is not easy. If it is a simple matter to learn enough of his language to catch the obvious beat of his lines, it is not so easy to recover the subtler beauties of rhythm and texture. Though with a little practice, coupled with good guessing, one can recognize familiar English words in the disguise of an old-fashioned spelling the familiar words may turn out to have an unfamiliar meaning, or to carry a very different con-

though not displeasing, is a complete falsification of Chaucer's art. Spenser deliberately chose a diction and spelling which should have for his own contemporaries the quaint flavor of long ago; Chaucer to his first readers would have seemed completely modern.

Well, what is to be done about it? If Chaucer is one of our greatest poets, it is a thousand pities that he should either not be read at all or seen only "in a blurred or fragmentary fashion." If translation into modern English will do the trick, then blessings on the head of the translator. But will it, and can it?

Every translation of a poetic masterpiece must in the nature of things be a substitution, and so at best a clever counterfeit. Transfusion of its authentic life blood is impossible. A translation of the "Canterbury Tales" may give with approximate truth the subject matter of Chaucer—his plots and his method of ordering them, the manners of his age, his comments on life, something of his images. It may give his jests, though not his humor. The words and rhythm are not Chaucer's but his translator's, even though, as in the translations before us, the metrical pattern is faithfully reproduced. The poetic art of Chaucer resides in that fusion of matter and form into an indivisible unity which is the essence of all artistic creation.

How dead is Chaucer's matter without some approximation to his form, one may see by trying to read the very accurate translation of his complete works into archaic prose, much burdened with "eke" and "prithce," published eighteen years ago by Tatlock and MacKaye. Though still in demand by undergraduates as a device for short-circuiting college requirements, it has made no impression on the great body of intelligent readers for whom it was intended.

Mr. Hill, an accomplished poet in his own right, has given us in graceful verse, pleasantly reminiscent now of William Morris, now of Mr. Masfield, and in a diction free from affected archaisms, a rendering which combines scholarly accuracy and fine poetic feeling. Even though a pale substitute for its great original, it is so readable that one hopes that Mr. Hill will go on and do the rest of the "Canterbury Tales" with equal competence.

I wish one could say as much for Mr. Van Wyck. I have no quarrel with the fact that his translation is often very free; but I question whether the use of ephemeral slang is the best way of exercising a translator's freedom. Here are two short specimens from the "Miller's Tale":

A silly ass  
Would be the fellow, German, Wop, or French,  
Who would not fall at once for this gay wench.

"Now mum's the word or I'll be a dead guy!"  
"Don't worry, kid," the good clerk made reply.

It is in the ribald tales, such as this of the Miller, that the translation is most readable. They are done with vivacity and gaiety. But the "jazzy" vulgarity of phrasing misrepresents the tone of the original. Even when Chaucer's humor is at its broadest and coarsest, and his manner is most colloquial, there remains in his lines that subtle quality of style which marks him as the fastidious artist.

In the more serious tales—and they are the majority—Mr. Van Wyck is much less adequate; when Chaucer rises to higher levels of poetry, his translator, forced to drop his vivacious gaiety, becomes merely dull. Here is what he makes of a striking passage in the "Pardoner's Tale":

Alas, not even Death will have my life,  
And thus I walk forever, full of strife.  
And on the ground, which is my mother's gate,  
I knock with my staff, early too, and late,  
And say: "Now, mother dear, please let me in.  
Diminished is my flesh and blood and skin.  
When will my bones forever be at rest?"

Failure to catch the appropriate tone is not Mr. Van Wyck's only shortcoming. He has repeatedly failed to understand the passage which he is rendering. Every page bristles with departures from the original which are the result not of freedom in translating, but of inadequate comprehension; and these blunders often play havoc with Chaucer's sense. Side by side in the Prologue stand the sharply contrasting figures of the worldly but highly respectable Monk and the ingratiating but disreputable begging Friar; yet the translator seems to regard the terms "monk" and "friar" as interchangeable, and four times calls

What sholde he studie, and make him-selven wood,  
Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure?

They are well translated by Mr. Hill:

For why go mad with studying all day,  
Poring over a book in some dark cell?

But Mr. Van Wyck, misunderstanding *wood*, an obsolete word which means "insane," and quite unaware of the fact that it is expected of a monk, but not of a friar, that he spend his days in cloistered study, gives us this:

Why should a friar be a log of wood,  
Cloistered from life, and reading, praying, fretting?

which misses the point rather seriously.

With blunders like this on every page, it is the more regrettable that so dull and tasteless a translation should have achieved the permanence and dignity of such beautiful typography and design and such brilliant illustration.

A reader who wishes without too much effort to know something about the "Canterbury Tales" may read Mr. Hill's graceful rendering with pleasure and profit. Any one who wishes really to enter the world of Chaucer's poetic art must still try to read him in the original. Even though he misses through imperfect mastery many finer shades of meaning, his vision of Chaucer will hardly be more "blurred and fragmentary" than that given in the pages of Mr. Van Wyck.

Apropos of centenaries to be celebrated in 1931 the London *Observer* calls attention to "Calverley (born 1831), who did so much to redeem Victorian literature from the charge of over-seriousness. Contemporary with him were Frederic Harrison, the high-priest of Positivism, who once confessed that he did not recollect ever having changed an opinion in his life; William Hale White, the author of 'The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford,' which has had a certain revival of interest during the past few years; and James Knowles, who founded and edited the *Nineteenth Century*, which, unlike the *Fortnightly*, made concessions in its title in deference to the lapse of time."

## Go to the Ant

ANTS. By JULIAN HUXLEY. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1930. \$1.50.

THE LIFE OF THE ANT. By MAURICE MAETERLINCK. New York: John Day Co. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by BEVERLY KUNKEL

Lafayette College

BOOKS on the ants and other social insects have always appealed to large numbers of readers and during the past few years the number which have appeared has been unusually large. Whether the great socialization of life in Russia has anything to do with the increasing interest in the social life of the insects is a question. Julian Huxley's little volume is of special value in that it makes clear the fundamental differences between the social organization of the insects and of man. Among these may be mentioned the fact that some grade of social life has been attained at least twenty-four times in the evolution of the insects, whereas the evolution from non-mammal to mammal has occurred but once. Furthermore, the societies of ants have changed extremely little since the Oligocene while human society has changed profoundly since man's origin, perhaps one one-hundredth of the period of ant life. Finally there may be mentioned the plasticity of human life based largely upon the human power of rapid learning and conceptual thinking which has enabled man to adapt himself to a great variety of circumstances at the same time that he has not changed his structure sufficiently to become more than a single species.

The treatment of the subject in Huxley's book is thoroughly scientific and shows a breadth of knowledge of the subject which appeals to the realist.

"The Life of the Ant," like its predecessors, "The Life of the Bee" and "The Life of the White Ant," owes its preëminence not alone to the accuracy and extent of Maeterlinck's knowledge of these insects, but also to the philosophical interpretation which the author places upon the social life of the insects and of man.

proximity of the life of the ants in contrast with that of the bees or the termites. The scientist must, of course, agree that there is much in the life of the insects, as in all other natural objects, which transcends our present understanding. Indeed, this volume should be read by every biologist who is inclined to the belief that our knowledge is satisfactory in reference to anything. It is good for the soul or whatever it is which makes us think and act as we do.

It does not seem, however, to be an advance in our thinking to attribute the achievements of the ants to an intelligence surpassing that of man. We might just as reasonably ascribe intelligence to the stomach which is able to digest certain kinds of food by means of enzymes or indeed to the platinum black of the chemical laboratory which hastens chemical reactions in the same way that the digestive enzymes do. But to do so obviously makes intelligence mean anything we want. To say that the whole colony of ants represents a single organism in which the separate ants have the same relation to the whole which the individual cells of a single organism bear to the individual, would seem also to make for confusion of thought since in the latter case there is a demonstrable mechanism for relating the action of the units which involves continuity of substance or nervous continuity or the distribution of hormones in the circulation, while in the ant colony there must be supposed some wholly unknown "complex of electromagnetic, etheric, or psychic relations." Of course these may be discovered some day; but for the present our ignorance is complete. Here and there in the single body of an animal the darkness is penetrated by our knowledge of nervous and harmonic actions.

The mystic may, of course, be right. Who knows? Scientific thinking, however, is hindered by such a philosophy.

These two volumes make extremely fascinating reading and are most stimulating. Whether we fail to grasp the mystic's point of view or not it is eminently good for us to make the attempt and "The Life of the Ant" certainly forces upon us a realization of the impossibility at present of understanding a vast number of formicine actions and habits.



## The Psychological Climate

THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN CULTURE. By THOMAS CUMING HALL. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1930. \$3.

THE PURITAN MIND. By HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1930. \$3.

CONWAY LETTERS. By MARJORIE HOPE NICOLSON. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1930. \$6.

Reviewed by RUFUS M. JONES

HERE are three striking books which deal with an epoch of history that is indissolubly builded into the psychological climate, the mental structure of thoughtful American citizens today. It would not be easy to pick out three books, focussing upon the same epoch, that are more divergent in outlook and point of view. The Puritan has suffered much at the hands of many diagnostics and the tale is not yet fully told. Each reporter reveals himself somewhat more truly than he reveals the character of the men he studies.

Dr. Hall has produced a unique book. He is a scholar of distinction and though he is working here in a new field of research for him, he has mastered his facts and speaks with an air of authority. His conclusions are startling but in the main, I believe, they are sound. He holds the position that John Wyclif and not John Calvin is the "father" of most of the religious ideas that form the background of colonial thought in America. English dissent had its birth in English nationalism and found its leader of genius in Wyclif, who taught that every soul could and must come into God's presence without mediation of either priest or church. Here is the principle which lay behind the leadership of George Fox, of John Wesley, and of General Booth.

The translation of the Bible and work of Lollard's lay preachers worked a silent popular revolution and at the heart of the movement lay a profound antagonism to the ancient forms of worship and the types of amusement that had come down from the past. The proportion of the English people touched by this early wave of reformation was very large. Gairdner in his History put it at even half of the entire population. Dr. Hall is more moderate in his estimate, but he gives evidence that the old system of life and thought was profoundly transformed by this popular movement. "The Lollards were typical Englishmen; they were interested in conduct." They lasted in unbroken succession down into the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth and they formed a solid stock of pre-Reformation Protestantism. Much of what has been attributed to outside influences was indigenous in England and developed from within.

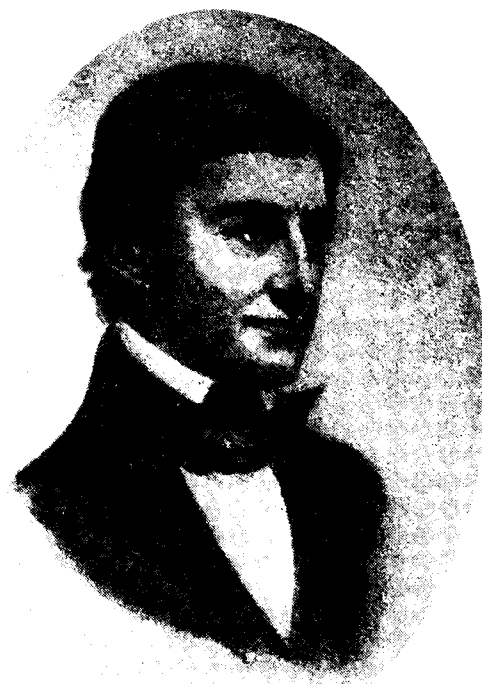
Dr. Hall contends that the dissenting type of English religious thought sprang out of this background. Congregationalism of the Pilgrim Fathers' type goes back, not to Robert Browne nor Henry Barrowe, but to its real father, John Wyclif and the Lollards. The same is true for the powerful stream of the Baptist movements. But the Puritans are another matter. They must not be confused with dissenters and separatists. They represent a high Church wing of the English Protestant movement. Their ideal of Church government was the Presbyterian form and their theology was Calvinist. They raised the Church to the supreme height of importance and they put the minister at the pinnacle of the human social system. Their conception of revelation made it absolute and final.

But it was dissent and not Puritanism that dominated American life and thought. This is Dr. Hall's unique contention. Puritanism had a short reign, either in England or America. It was a brief and passing theory. If Westminster Presbyterianism had captured England it might have dominated America also, but it did neither. The older and more native tradition finally conquered and America became predominantly "separatist" rather than "puritan."

There is no doubt that this interesting book draws the distinction too sharply between the separating bodies and the Puritan Church. But Professor Schneider's "Puritan Mind" makes far too little of the distinction, as do many writers on the history of Colonial New England. He nowhere carefully discriminates the separatist type of mind from the Puritan type. He confuses Pilgrims and Puritans, as though they were part of the same movement. A good deal of the time the author is recording the state of knowledge, the prevailing thought of the times and the emotional tone, and loosely calls it "Puritan."

He does no sort of justice to Roger Williams and he takes very little pains to understand what lay behind the contentions of this pure minded "Seeker." He still less understands the mind and spirit of the Quaker "invaders." He gives the number of New England "martyrs" incorrectly and he misses the real reason why persecution stopped in the Bay Colony.

The major weakness which marks the book, as I see it, is the over-emphasis of the social and economic factors in what is called the making of "the Puritan mind." There is throughout a failure to get the inside approach to the religious mind of the period. The intensity of the religious spirit of the time is hardly felt. Puritans are treated as though they looked at life as a modern man looks at it. The martyr fires that lay behind their white hot faith is inadequately visualized. It is seen peculiarly in the failure to understand the immense theological difference which underlay the Quaker and the Puritan. This sentence may be taken as an illustration of the wrong clue: "The mere fact that the disputes with the Quakers became so violent and were conducted with so much hatred is circumstantial evidence that there were underlying social differences." Everywhere in the first chapters of the book I fail to find



EMERSON

Illustration from "Emerson, the Enraptured Yankee," by Régis Michaud (Brentanos). See page 552.

any real appreciation of the vast variety of types into which the religious movements of the time were divided and I feel that the author remains on the outside and misses the intense caloric which characterizes these seventeenth century faiths. The economic factors were there of course, but something else of importance was there too.

In spite of these points of what seem to me to be lack of historical accuracy, it is in many respects an able and valuable book. There is an excellent chapter on "The Great Awakening" which includes a good study and appraisal of Jonathan Edwards, of his mystical experience and his power as a preacher. The book closes with a chapter on "Ungodly Puritans" which is mainly occupied with Benjamin Franklin and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

"The Conway Letters" is in every way a remarkable volume of over five hundred closely printed pages. Anne, Viscountess Conway (1631-1679), was one of the most remarkable women of her century, gifted with much charm and with a philosophical mind and with the spiritual passion of a great Seeker. She became an intimate friend of Henry More, the poet, scholar, and Cambridge platonist. Nearly half the letters in the book are written by these two correspondents.

After 1670 Francis Mercury van Helmont, the "Scholar Gypsy" enters the story. He becomes physician to Lady Conway who was a lifelong sufferer and from that time on his opinions and theories, his "anatomy of pain," and his cabalistic studies are much in evidence. After a little time in Ragley Hall, Van Helmont became a Quaker. Then George Fox, Robert Barclay, William Penn, George Keith, and many other prominent Quakers come and go in these interesting pages. The various members of the Conway family filled places of great importance in public life and consequently the Letters touch the political movements of the period as well as almost the entire range of the intellectual life of the last half of that century. Eventually, Lady Conway her-

self became a Quaker and Lord Conway found his beautiful Hall—one of the most beautiful in England—transformed into a rendez-vous for Quaker preachers and visitors. His wife became "plain" and gave him the speech of "thee and thou" and signed her letters, "Thine affectionately and really," while the husband, though much averse to the change, continued to address his wife, "My dearest deare."

Anne Conway's one book, "Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy," profoundly influenced the great philosopher Leibnitz and this woman, who had only two words, "Quaker Lady," scratched on the cover of her leaden coffin, was directly or indirectly linked up in life with almost every important thinker of her time.

The book is admirably edited and is marked throughout by solid scholarship and excellent taste. There will be too many letters for most readers, but as they touch almost every variety of life and thought in the seventeenth century there should be a corresponding variety of readers. Here, once more, are many influences that helped to produce our psychological climate.

## Fire-Fighters

YE OLDE FIRE LADDIES. By HERBERT ASBURY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1930. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THE first fires in New York, in the good old eighteenth century days when fires were quenched (if at all) by the united exertions of the populace. Everyone rushed out with buckets, lines were formed under the supervision of fire-wardens, and amid a terrific uproar part of the water was tossed on the flames and most of it on the spectators. Not until 1731 did the march of civilization bring in the fire engine. A Londoner named Richard Newsham had invented one which threw a stream 150 feet in the air, and a New York committee composed of Aldermen Roosevelt, Cruger, and Rutgers imported two from England. Lusty citizens would ply the pumps vigorously, while others emptied buckets into the cistern underneath. But even the best engines were defective. They broke down, they sucked dry, their stream faltered. In 1731 citizens had a dreadful hour when St. Trinity took fire, and the engines proved to be unable to reach it; fortunately the church was saved by a few daring men who climbed the steeple from within. After the Revolution new-fangled ideas in fire-fighting came in apace. Leather hose was first used in New York in 1790, enabling the citizens to use the water of the Hudson and East rivers in place of the inadequate wells of Manhattan. In 1822 an ingenious fireman, who had grown tired of helping lug the hose upon his shoulders, built the first hose-cart. Nearly everything that caught fire still burned up, and fires occurred constantly; but the New Yorkers had the consolation of knowing that the best equipment assisted them at the loss of their houses.

Mr. Asbury has written a rambling, gossippy, and extremely entertaining account of all this, and of the exploits of the New York firemen down to the Civil War, with emphasis laid strongly on the human and humorous elements. Early in the nineteenth century the volunteer fire companies became important political and social units. The members received no pay. But they had a rich reward in public prestige, in the joys of special suppers, balls, and like entertainments, in the friendships of ward bosses and other politicians, and in adventure. Their rivalry led to battles which sometimes quite halted the minor business of stopping a conflagration. They indulged themselves in awe-inspiring fire-hats, sometimes so richly embellished with gold and silver that they cost hundreds of dollars each, and in costly decorations and oil-paintings for their engines. They prided themselves on their fists, their oaths, their nicknames, and their emblems; the engine of the Americus Company, of which William M. Tweed was foreman, bore emblazoned on its sides the tiger that was later made symbolic of Tammany Hall.

All the lore of which Mr. Asbury became possessed when he wrote his treatise on the gangs of New York is of value in these pages. Though he hints at scandalous disorders, his general treatment of the fire-laddies is flattering. He tells us something of their street encounters, and their subserviency to the worst political organizations of the time; but he suppresses the darker accusations against them. The truth seems to be that the worst fire companies, with their runners and hangers-on, learned to set fires for the fun of the thing, and spent more time in looting