

## 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.

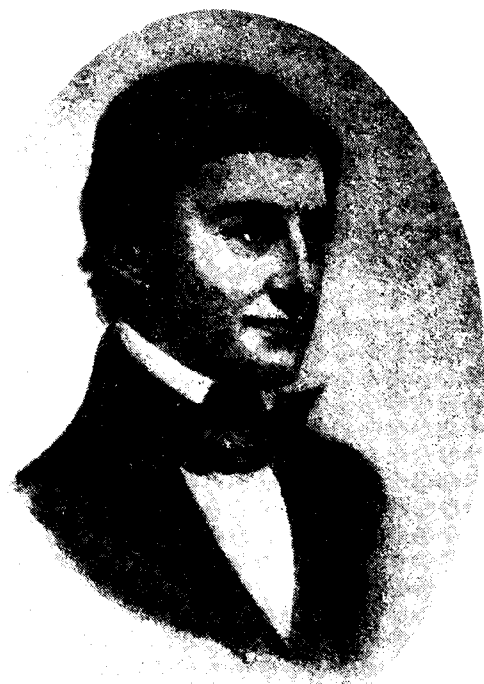
Dr. Hall contends that the dissenting type of English religious thought sprang out of this background. Congregationalism of the Pilgrim Fathers' type goes back, not to Robert Browne nor Henry Barrowe, but to its real father, John Wyclif and the Lollards. The same is true for the powerful stream of the 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 Gipsy" 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



the fire-stricken neighborhood than in suppressing the flames. When in 1865 the volunteer companies were abolished, New Yorkers heaved a sigh of relief. Mr. Asbury's loose-jointed narrative, which includes everything from an account of the tea-water pumps to a history of the burning of two negroes at the stake in 1741, is an amusing if not at all important contribution to the social history of the metropolis.

## Critics of Different Species

FOUR CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS. By WILBUR L. CROSS. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1930. \$2.

SOME OF US. By JAMES BRANCH CABELL. New York: Robert W. McBride. 1930. \$7.50.

NOVELS AND NOVELISTS. By KATHERINE MANSFIELD. Edited by J. MIDDLETON MURRY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1930.

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON

PROFESSOR CROSS, Mr. Cabell, and Katherine Mansfield are critics of different species. These essays of Katherine Mansfield's are hasty book reviews of novels published in 1919 and 1920, and whether Mr. Murry was well advised to collect them need not be discussed. There is always a spark in her writing. Most of the novels she reviews I have never read and shall never read. Between Professor Cross's slow pace and deliberate scrutiny, and Mr. Cabell's minute manner, airy and acid, there is nothing but contrast. Professor Cross is a historian of literature and his four essays are in continuation of his "Development of the English Novel," which was published in 1899 and closed with Kipling. He assumes, with reason, that his four novelists (Conrad, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells) are secure of a place in literary history. "Not all the aspects of contemporary civilization appear in these four novelists, but in no other group of writers is there so much." The "not all" might better have been emphasized by "of course," and "English novelists" substituted with advantage for "writers." Mr. Cabell "finds some merit" in ten recent or current American writers, novelists all except one; but he sees the signs of mortality in them all. He suspects them to be all headed for oblivion, or, as selectly phrased, "handsomely ripening toward" it; a "dizaine" of meritorious authors proclaimed by admiring optimists and doomed by critical foresight. This probable doom, he says, was first suggested by himself in 1929, but the idea has since "been endorsed in dizzily high circles" and has collected a group of "new disciples gratifying to obtain."

Parenthetically speaking, it is my impression that this seminal idea, suggested by Mr. Cabell in 1929, had been suggested often enough before by many people to whom it did not occur that there was anything original about it. There are always some critics who see enduring distinction in all their favorites, and others to whom everything contemporary looks ephemeral. But a critic who thinks the probable waning of current celebrities his own unique discovery, and that all who happen to think the same are his disciples, is something of an oddity. In the way of further parenthesis, the word *dizaine* might be a useful word if it existed in the English language, but it does not. Mr. Cabell writes noticeably good English when his attitudes and neologies are not too obsessional.

There are various kinds and degrees of being forgotten. Oblivion is relative. Probably as many people read Dickens now as in his lifetime, but not George Eliot. Readers of Mrs. Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis are few indeed, but still occasional, and they have a place in literary histories. Their oblivion is not absolute. The night that has fallen over old sermons and medieval Latin would seem to be as dark and deep as anything conceivable, but Mr. T. S. Eliot finds solace and inspiration in the sermons of seventeenth century divines, and there are those to whom medieval Latin poetry is not a Ph. D. thesis but a thrill. The name of the man who wrote the "Confessio" is lost, but one can know quite a little about him, and the "Confessio" is a poem to make the latest disillusionist sit up and take notice. Some authors never had many readers, but in every generation a few. There are always curious people of individual palate who go poking about the centuries and taking delight in the unconsidered things they pick up. Who reads American humorists of the last century, Sam Slick, Petroleum V. Nasby, and the rest? Mr. Don Seitz both reads them and collects them, and probably is not alone. Our young intelligentsia may assume that no one reads Cooper, Longfellow, Bulwer Lytton, or Mar-

ion Crawford, but our public librarians know better. I once knew a college professor to whom the Saxon Cynewulf was as luminous a name as that of Edmund Spenser or John Milton. Literary immortality is like a lit space in the dark, large or merely a speck, bright or dim, steady or unsteady. A large dim space may stand for a man whom, roughly speaking, everybody has heard of and nobody reads except literary historians. A speck of light, bright, constant, but minute, might represent a poem that appears in all the anthologies and flourishes in quotation, while the rest of the author is wholly, or almost, forgotten.

To return to Mr. Cabell, I confess to as small an acquaintance with the novels of Frances Newman and Ellen Glasgow as his is, by confession, with those of Willa Cather, and am content to let that difference of range remain. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Mencken have "made a dent" in their epoch, and the literary histories can hardly forget them as much as a general public will be apt to. Elinor Wylie's verse has interested me more than her fiction, and I have no opinion about the intentions of oblivion toward either. Mr. Cabell dismisses the poets from consideration, "since verse making is no longer a pursuit of the adult-minded." Well, who is adult anyway, and what is the good of it? Is novel writing a pursuit of the adult-minded? His "Manuel" and "Jurgen" look to me like the genuine creations of a mind not too oppressively adult. There is no other American satirist at present so light fingered. He flits as obviously as Mr. Dreiser flounders. His preciosity is decorative in Poictesme, but annoying as a set mannerism, pirouetting by habit. I suspect the intentions of oblivion toward Mr. Anderson and Mr. Hergesheimer are quite different. Mr. Anderson seems to interest Mr. Cabell chiefly because of their common experience with the censor. He interests me for reasons independent of the censor.

And—still apropos of oblivion—future historians of English fiction are not likely to be unacquainted with the work of Professor Cross.

## Hell-Bent for Sacrifice

RACHEL MOON. By LORNA REA. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

THE differentiating names may be gone but some of those six Mrs. Greens remain pleasantly clear in the minds of the readers of Lorna Rea's first novel. The oldest Mrs. Green, dressing, she will still be there, and the frightful, fawning widow with a child. A book of women that went a little further into feminine psychology than the first corner, where the male lurks. Some of these women had a shallow breadth, some a deep narrowness, but one had more. In six women Lorna Rea caught woman fairly well. Now, in her second novel, she takes up a single woman, and takes her up simply, without the aid of any device of form such as that so successful in the earlier work.

The determined sacrifice of self is usually given short shrift these days both in and out of fiction. The phantom-like, husbandless creature, who moved about quietly a generation ago to the needs or demands of another woman's children, has passed, equally quietly, entirely out of the picture. The unmarried aunt of yesteryear whose whole life was an expiation of her failure to get, or keep alive, a husband, is gone with the snows. When economic opportunity and public opinion gave her an inch, she took her long overdue ell; aunts became people. And people who insisted upon self-sacrifice and martyrdom caught the unpleasantly penetrating attention of Herr Freud of Vienna. When self-abnegation became a symptom rather than a virtue, it lost, quite naturally, its large following. But the few abnegators left, those born to be, become rich material for novelists.

A material, however, that requires a clearly understood and clearly expressed *raison d'être*. A heroine may be given blue eyes and slim hands merely because the author fancies them or because the hero's mother had them and the hero needs a mother-complex to explain the girl's attraction for him. But if a heroine is to have the perverse passion for sacrifice to the extent that Rachel Moon has, it is incumbent upon the author to explain. One does not detour through life over a steep and rocky bypath unless some momentous obstacle has been encountered on the main traveled highway. The person on the bypath is obviously more interesting than the one who travels with the crowd, but part of that interest lies in the causes that brought about the situation.

Nowhere in Lorna Rea's new novel is an adequate cause given for Rachel's being what she is. We meet her as a romantic girl of eighteen, already an extremist in everything, and nothing could be more convincing than her impulsive reaction to the news of her mother's sudden and complete paralysis. She turns her bright face away from life towards the repulsive figure of living death. It seems an extremist's perfect gesture, they have always been prone to rush right into action, but usually they rush right out again. And this is what we expect of Rachel. Nothing that we know of her, her youth, her romanticism, her impulsiveness has sufficiently prepared us for her grim adherence to the bitter course she embraced on the spur of an emotional moment.

Once the arbitrary pattern imposed upon her by the author is accepted, however, Rachel becomes real enough. She has the passion and the stubbornness of a true martyr. For better or for worse—and it is obviously for the worse—she insists upon renunciation. She demands the world's left hand when the right is stretched pleasantly out to her. She has the zeal that puts duty before pleasure, her duty before the pleasure of others. She is hell-bent for sacrifice.

"Six Mrs. Greens" was made up consciously of separate excellencies. The form denied the possibility of continuity of character. "Rachel Moon" has these same qualities, but, in it, because the intent is so different, they become defects. The graciousness of outlook and the stylistic beauty are here, the same short emphatic character sketches are here, but the central thread with which they should all be woven into a whole is not elastic enough for its purpose. All of which is to forget that this is a first novel, even if a second book, for Lorna Rea's work has a toughness of fibre that disdains such factual concessions.

## Contrasting Methods

CERTAIN PEOPLE. By EDITH WHARTON. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1930. \$2.

IN OUR TIME. By ERNEST HEMINGWAY. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1930. \$2.50.

THE first of these books is not the most important of Mrs. Wharton's collections of short stories, but it is certainly proof that her skill does not fail with years. There is one story which deals with the visit of a woman to the house of her dying lover, and her repulse, without revelation on either side, by his jealous sister, that, one is tempted to say, only Mrs. Wharton could have written. Her art is an art of nuances, and nuance is precisely what current fiction, particularly current American fiction of the direct action type, has entirely lost. It is interesting to compare this volume with a reprint just issued of Hemingway's first book, also a collection of stories. The intense vividness of Hemingway's scenes—for example, the return of the youth to his northern fishing river is not matched by anything in Mrs. Wharton, but she gets subtler, if not stronger, facts about human nature, and makes them far more articulate. Where men and women who have been smoothed and refined by special experience are concerned, she is still our most competent artist in fiction. But she has to keep to such material. There are no more "Ethan Fromes." And the episodes of New York journalistic life in her "Hudson River Bracketed" were as weak as her country-house scenes were strong.

Emil Ludwig has just finished a play in which the chief character is the late President Wilson. It is called "Versailles."

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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