

that "old and gray-headed" rumor. He considers that we are justified in taking the words of Plutarch "in a soft and flexible sense" when he asserts that "the brain of a Phoenix is a pleasant bit, but it causeth the headache." Tentatively, after many preambles and hesitations and arguments for and against, he comes to the conclusion that the existence of the bird must be referred "unto consideration." He arrives at this decision for the reason that the bird has never been seen, though the importance of this point was sharply disputed by Sir Thomas Browne's adversary, Alexander Ross, who accounts for this fact in the following manner. The Phoenix knowing itself to be unique is instinctively actuated by the strongest desire at all times and in all places to keep out of sight and thereby secure against preventable accidents.

Sir Thomas Browne's vision of the world was "asquint upon reflex or shadow." It was such a world as we see represented on old tapestries where a land-unicorn, because of its "glory," is compelled to graze upon a sloping bank; a world suggested on ancient ocean maps in which sea-unicorns are portrayed with "glories" of such strength and bigness as are able to penetrate the ribs of ships. He sets himself to examine with reasoning unreason all the fabulous talk invented by the barbarous fancies of men as little by little they have adjusted their evolving consciousness to the phenomena of the natural world.

That some Elephants have not only written whole sentences . . . but have also spoken . . . although it sound like that of Achilles' Horse in Homer, we do not conceive impossible. . . . The Serpent that spake unto Eve, the Dogs and Cats that usually speak unto Witches, might afford some encouragement. And since broad and thick chops are required of speaking Birds, etc., etc.

He holds that there is no "high improbability in the relation" that the Basilisk, the little King of Serpents, "poisoneth by he eye and by priority of vision," but in sentence that smacks of severity he feels compelled to qualify his confidence as to the report of its engendering. "As for the generation of the Basilisk that it proceedeth from a Cock's egg hatched under a Toad or a Serpent it is a conceit as monstrous as the brood itself." He finds it difficult to believe that the pigmies during their perennial wars with the cranes ride into battlefield on the backs of partridges; and as for the report that napkins are woven from the wool of a Salamander he regards it as "a fallacious enlargement" considering the hairless nature of the skin of the creature, a Salamander being "a kind of Lizard, a quadruped, coticated and depilous."

It is extraordinarily engaging to picture the "painful" and curious doctor in his old garden house, described by Evelyn as "a cabinet of rarities," carrying out his various empirical tests: hanging up dead kingfishers to see whether or no their azure bodies do, in very truth, show the quarter of the wind "by an occult and secret propriety," and discovering to his discomforture that they seldom "breasted it right": keeping vipers in a glass and feeding them on bran and cheese: to his shame fastening a "little frog of an excellent Parrat-green" about a span under water to see how long it would live without air: collecting examples of worked flints—"Faery stones, elfe spurs": discovering the eyes of a mole, or "moll" as he calls it, "those little orbs": confirming the report by trial in his own larder that peacock's flesh "roast or boiled" will preserve a long time "incorrupted": shutting up toads and spiders together to discover whether there was truth or no in the tale of their ancient enmity: dissecting the neck of a swan, and as an explanation of its dying melody, noting "the serpentine and trumpet recurvation" of the bird's windpipe.

He has an eye for everything. No experiment is too delicate for him. He studies the deathwatch beetle: "We have taken many thereof and kept them in their boxes wherein I have heard and seen them work and knock with a little proboscis or trunk against the side of the box, like a Picus Martius or Woodpecker against the tree." He discovers at

the bottoms of the flowers of his tulips "a small bee-like fly of an excellent fragrant odour." He is fascinated to observe the seed of silkworms "hatched on the bodies of women."

On occasions his observation would appear almost too narrow. In many country churches the royal arms of England still hang where they were set up at the time of the Restoration. The conventional rendering of the heraldic animals must stand corrected under Sir Thomas Browne's strict scrutiny. "If in the Lion, the position of the pizel be proper, and that the natural situation; it will be hard to make out their retro-copulation or their coupling and pissing backward, ac-



WILLIAM HARLAN HALE.

ording to the determination of Aristotle; All that urine backward do copulate aversely as Lions, Hares, etc."

A whale was washed ashore at a little place called Wells, in Norfolk, and in spite of the fact that he had often declared his interest more piqued by the ants than by the larger animals ("Ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious pieces of Nature, Whales, Elephants, Dromedaries, and Camels; these, I confess, are the Colossus and Majestick pieces of her hand: but in these narrow Engines [ants] there is more curious Mathematicks; and the civility of these little Citizens, more neatly sets forth the Wisdom of their Maker"), he is now all on fire to search for ambergris. But alas! the whale had been dead "divers days" and we read this doleful account, "In vain was it to rake for ambrgreece in the paunch of this Leviathan." In vain to call to memory that "Paracelsus encourageth, ordure makes the best musk and from the most fetid substances may be drawn the most odoriferous essences."

It is indeed easy enough to make merry with the various turns taken by Sir Thomas Browne's quincunial intelligence, but we would have considered his writings in vain if we failed to bring back to our memory some of those semi-philosophical, semi-religious utterances that give to his style so impressive and so mysterious a music—a music as deep as the music of the oceans, airy as the music of the spheres, a music that seems indeed to be in alliance with that eternity "which maketh pyramids pillars of snow, and all that's past a moment."

"The world to me is but a dream or mock-show, and we all therein but Pantalones and Anticks to my severer contemplations."

"Fortune, that serpentine and crooked line."

"There is therefore a secret glome or bottom of our days."

"There is surely a piece of Divinity in us, something that was before the Elements, and owes no homage unto the sun."

Finally, in one of the greatest and most moving passages that his imaginative faith ever inspired—"However, I am sure there is a common Spirit that plays within us, yet makes no part of us; and that is the Spirit of God, the fire and scintillation of that noble and . . . Essence, which is the life and . . . heat of Spirits, and their esse: . . . it know not the virtue of the Sur . . . quite con-

trary to the fire of Hell: This is that gentle heat that broodeth on the waters, and in six days hatched the World; this is that irradiation that dispels the mists of Hell, the clouds of horror, fear, sorrow, despair; and preserves the region of the mind in serenity."

Llewelyn Powys, who has at various times been a resident of the United States and a rancher in Africa, and is now living in his native England, is one of a family of noted writers. Among his works are "Ebony and Ivory" and "Black Laughter."

A Challenge to Boredom

A PRIVATE UNIVERSE. By ANDRÉ MAUROIS. New York: D. Appleton and Company. 1932. \$2.50.

FEAR AND TREMBLING. By GLENWAY WESCOTT. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1932. \$3.50.

CHALLENGE TO DEFEAT. By WILLIAM HARLAN HALE. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LEE WILSON DOBB

WRITING of Americans in Crisis, "What was the result of the crisis," asks M. Maurois, "on the small group of rebels whom we observed in 1927?" And he replies: "It would appear that it has drawn this group closer to the herd; or more exactly, that the mass has drawn closer to this group. Men in general are beginning to see that the rebels were right in declaring that there were other things in human life beyond prosperity. Having less money for the pleasures of excitement, they turn towards the pleasures of culture. This, of course, is true as yet only of a select minority; but, for example, in the universities of the Eastern States one no longer finds the young intellectuals spurned by the athletes. The result is that the intellectual ceases to be a rebel and becomes more constructive." M. Maurois is a disinterested observer, always temperate in his judgments. It is true, I believe, that the average American, during the past three years, has been progressively jolted a few inches toward the left, and that he has been slightly infected by the disease of thought. There is small evidence as yet, however, that the infection is likely to prove severe.

I do not know whether Mr. Glenway Wescott may properly be classed with the "small group of rebels" of 1927. He is primarily, I suspect, an artist in prose fiction, and his present critical commentary on our immediate difficulties and confusions makes one rather regret the novel whose creation has thus been postponed. Frankly, Mr. Wescott's agreeably written commentary slides across consciousness, with a minimum of friction, leaving virtually no trace behind. Doubtless the fault is largely mine, but I confess (not without fear and trembling) that I am unable to grasp what Mr. Wescott is attempting to say in this by no means brief volume. I understand each flowing sentence as it passes, I seem to follow the windings of each well-composed paragraph, yet I end as I began. Nothing has happened to me. Though there is probably an explanation for this which is anything but flattering to the reviewer, it is merely honest that an impression of futility should be recorded. With whom the fault ultimately lies is a question which other and wiser heads must, so far as this reviewer is concerned, be left to decide.

With the admirably balanced and controlled mind of M. Maurois there are no difficulties to experience; there are perhaps not enough. Intelligence, clarity, poise, are rare gifts (less rare among the intellectuals of France than elsewhere), but we of the more chaotic races are not always fully nourished by them. That the best lighting system for mortals is ordinary daylight is doubtless true; but there is a good deal to be said for the unexpected flash of fire at midnight: in a fractional second of burning vision the too familiar, the habitual, is revealed as the infinitely strange. M. Maurois is too civilized a being, however, to indulge himself in hurling bolts; he prefers to be a source of equably diffused illumination.

The private universe which he thus softly yet completely lights up for us,

bidding us enter and placing us at our ease, is a universe of gently sceptical and entirely unexcited intellectual curiosity and integrity. His central conviction (for all scepticism is founded on a central faith) is a belief in the necessary relativity of all human guesses at truth. "If," he writes, "our epoch is capable of contributing an original philosophy, it is one of absolute relativity." In a brief, cool, lucid essay he applies this philosophy to the present economic chaos, and it brings him to such quiet statements as these: "There is no such thing as economic truth; or rather, every moment has its own economic truth. . . . It is not immoral to be a capitalist, it is not criminal to be a communist; but it would be intelligent to admit that every doctrine is baneful if it is rigid. . . . Economic rulers should hold a doctrine only for the provisional co-ordination of their actions." In other words, man's wisdom is limited, in every field, to the experimental and the expedient. Mournful conclusion? Not necessarily, answers M. Maurois. An American editor demands of him: "Do you not think that modern Science, by . . . expelling from the heavens the divinities who formerly dwell there, has robbed us of the illusions which alone enabled men to live? . . . Where do you find your consolations and your hopes? In fact—on what hidden treasure do you live?" M. Maurois smiles over this letter; his nimble novelist's fancy sets to work.

A colony from Earth, from England, has established itself on the Moon. They are ruled, in their ideas and ideals, by the King of England—to them for ever silent and invisible. In the course of generations the young intellectuals of the



ANDRÉ MAUROIS.

colony have come to doubt his reality. But beware! (say the Conservatives): "If you strip the Earth planet of our King . . . what meaning will your life have (Continued on next page)"

Keep Them Alive

(Continued from preceding page)

at tremendous expense and with a frightful waste of discarded books, the natural and proper reading methods of the public. They have tried to sell books as if they were magazines, and they have failed.

We must in short decide whether our books are like flowers or like marmalade—flowers to be fresh cut daily because they wilt by evening, or marmalade that can be stored until it is time for toast and tea. And if a good book should be kept alive until its clientele find it (and of course it can and should be) then publishers' advertising (which just now is composed too much for the bookseller, too little for the reader and buyer) should help, and editorial departments, which keep smothering new books with newer ones, should exercise restraint, and magazines like *The Saturday Review* should do their part in retrospect and reappraisal and renewed recommendation. We at least propose to reform, and do our best to keep good new books alive at least while the gloss of a year's freshness is still on them. After that, if they are fit, they will take care of themselves.

for you then? What will be the main-springs of your energy? On what hidden treasure will you live?" Then, for the first time, a great writer appears on the Moon—a lyrical philosopher, who addresses an imaginary disciple, Selenos. And "Why," he asks, "Why Selenos, do you seek the meaning of life elsewhere than in life itself? . . . The sophists are teaching you to-day that life is but a short movement . . . that nothing exists but defeat and death. But I say to you . . . live as if you were eternal, and do not believe that your life is changed because they have proved to you that the Earth is empty. You are not living on the Earth, Selenos, but in yourself, yourself alone."

Live as if you were eternal! That also, if I read him rightly, is one-half of the central message of William Harlan Hale, whose "Challenge To Defeat" is the most significant utterance that has yet come from our youngest literary generation. Mr. Hale—as each of his successive reviewers points out with an astonishment more than a little patronizing—is but twenty-one; and he has actually dared to publish a thoughtful, eloquent, fighting book—a rallying cry to Youth.

My own initial amazement on reading this book springs from the fact that Mr. Hale is not afraid to be eloquent. He writes with frankness, energy, and conviction. Here, surely, is something so out-moded as to be startlingly new in this self-conscious, ironic, wise-cracking world. God help the youngsters of yesterday and the day before—they were born with their tongues in their hollow cheeks! Mr. Hale has a better use for his. He is bent on drastic criticism, solid exposition, and final persuasion; he is not concerned to be paradoxical or clever; and if he utters an occasional platitude he is too busy and serious to blush for it. There happens to be something he wants to get said—something which he believes important. And I agree with him. It is important, and it has been waiting to be said. "Challenge To Defeat" is a protest, a deeply conceived and thoroughly informed protest, against the futitarianism in life and art of the post-war generations.

To put it quite simply (perhaps too simply) Mr. Hale, speaking for the young intellectuals who are coming of age now—1932—says in effect: "We are sick of futility. This is our world; we must live in it; and we shall at least try to make it worth living in. If we are to do so, we must first conceive a humanism that is not merely academic, sterile. A genuine humanism, whose general function is to bring the objective, scientific attitude into a true relationship to the individual; and to broaden the subjective, artistic attitude into a view of abiding principles and truths that transcend the individual. Amid the vast apparent negation of the macrocosm, our own microcosm stands as a vast affirmation: the human truth, the human value, the human will. These things remain. They do not pass, so long as humanity is there to perceive them."

And, finally: "We may be the clowns in a comedy for the gods, but we shall play our parts to the finish, and know that our acting is the veriest reality; and when the play is played out, it may not have been so poor a show."

Is not that preferable to Conrad Aiken's vision of himself as a vaudeville stage across which a disjointed and comparatively meaningless series of acts is perpetually passing?

I agree with Mr. Hale that we are quite capable (even putting life at its lowest) of presenting the gods with a better organized entertainment than that. I agree with Mr. Hale (and thus far disagree with M. Maurois) that our universes, these latter years, have been far too private. As for Mr. Wescott, there is at least one intuition of his which I was able to understand and to applaud. "What sort of being," he asks himself, "is an angel?" And he replies, "A creature incapable of boredom. . . ."

We have latterly much needed in our lives something of this superb angelic incapacity—since boredom is the mother of defeat. It is Boredom herself, that slut-tish Anarch fouling our minds and hearts,

whom Mr. Hale has challenged to mortal combat. M. Maurois snug in his private universe, will perhaps smile at a certain bravado in this youthful gesture, but his smile will be indulgent; and in justice to M. Maurois it must be added that, though dwelling in retirement, safely above the battle, he is never bored.

An Enchanted Island

NONSUCH. By WILLIAM BEEBE. New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam. 1932. \$3.50.

Reviewed by SAMUEL SCOVILLE, JR.

TO an ordinary observer Nonsuch is an island among the Bermudas of sand and cedars, of coral reefs and petrified eolian sand. William Beebe has magicked it into a land of enchantment where are to be found wild-folk, strange and new, and where commonplace things, by some strange seachange, are metamorphosed into shapes of unearthly beauty. This book in which



WILLIAM BEEBE.

he has depicted it, is the first of four concerning life in Bermudian waters, to be written by Dr. Beebe as director of the Department of Tropical Research of the New York Zoological Society.

Although no volume by Beebe has appeared since 1928, his pen has not lost either its cunning or its color. Some years ago this reviewer visited Bermuda and noted in his commonplace-book that the snowy breast of the yellow-billed tropic bird, as it flew over the sapphire and ultramarine water, was stained lune-green—and rather prided himself on his observation. That was before he had read what Dr. Beebe had to say about that bird.

Their breasts are as immaculate as snow but over the shallows their plumage takes on the faintest, most delicate of pale chrysoprase, and far out from the land, where the water draws its color from a full mile depth of ocean, the reflection touches the plumage with a bubble-thin tint of ultramarine. When we see a tropic bird in full plumage on its nest in sunlight, within arm's length, a new color impinges upon our retina—we can no longer call its breast and tail white, and we cannot say that they are salmon or pink, the delicacy of this new real tone survives no human-made name, it is sheer beauty.

William Beebe has an unerring sense not only of color and beauty but also of adventure.

A hawk's nest on the Great Pyramid; the sights from his Bathysphere at the greatest depth under water—1,200 feet—ever reached by a living man; the strange forms of life to be found in the tree-tops of a tropical forest, never reached before his time because of fire ants—all of these Beebe describes with a gusto which makes them fatally interesting from a scientific standpoint, for adventure, color, and beauty are anathema and maranatha to the average scientist, as Seton and Hudson found out to their cost. Just as "Life Histories of Northern Animals" and "Birds of La Plata" at last established them in scientific circles, so "A Monograph of the Pheasants" enabled Beebe to live down in scientific circles, the sheer

beauty and romance of "Jungle Peace."

In this, his latest book, there are the same series of little delightful adventures which so distress members of learned societies. Shooting flying-fish, fishing for blue sharks, rounding up a herd of fresh-hatched sea-horses, rescuing drowning tropic birds, and discovering an island of rare Audubon shear-waters, are some of them. He stresses the fact, too, which all nature observers find out sooner or later, that "to be a good naturalist one must be a stroller or a creeper or better still a squatter."

One never reads any of Beebe's books without feeling that he experiences that strange, indefinable emotion which only the real nature lover can ever hope to know. It is more than contentment, it is more than pleasure, it is even beyond happiness. It is something which children have and which comes to a few of us in adult years at times out under the open sky. The sight of some exquisite orchid in the dusk of a hidden marsh, the song of the veery at twilight, or of the hermit-thrush at dawn, the finding of a rare nest—any of these may arouse in the initiate a certain indescribable ecstasy which can be felt but scarcely described. It is that quality of joy which shines out in all of Beebe's books and gleams in every chapter of "Nonsuch."

Prisoner's Love

THE FOUNTAIN. By CHARLES MORGAN. New York: Alfred Knopf. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

THIS is such a good book that it is quite disheartening to write about it. For what can one say?

The usual praise, "read it at one sitting" or "this is the greatest masterpiece of all time since the greatest masterpiece of all time that appeared yesterday" or "not since the days of Dante and Sinclair Lewis, etc., etc."?

No, all this will hardly fit the case. It is just a very civilized book, a quiet book, a book without any pictures, an interesting story interestingly told, and when the tale has come to its logical conclusion, one puts the volume aside as if one had read the private letter of a close friend who had passed through a very trying experience. Perhaps in the morning one would answer him. Perhaps one would not. It would not matter. Answer or no answer, your friendship would continue as of old. This is a good book, and it comes as a breath of fresh country air after six months of New York city streets.

Mr. Morgan, apparently, is a survivor of the great Antwerp fiasco, engineered and directed by that past master of brilliant and useless failures, the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, who only recently honored our lecture platform with his imposing presence and his impassioned appeal for Anglo-Saxon solidarity.

This unfortunate expedition, minus everything except sublime ignorance of the terrain across which it was expected to operate and an astounding amount of good will and useless courage, was forced across the Dutch border like a foot-ball player forced out of bounds by his opponent. The Dutch, while trying to take care of half a million Belgian refugees, also found themselves favored with the cheery remnant of an entire British naval brigade which hardly knew whence it was coming and was almost sublimely ignorant of its final place of destination.

They were pleasant and acceptable young men. Their officers would have been agreeable week-end guests and the privates would have made excellent servants. But they wore khaki uniforms. They must therefore be treated and regarded as "interned soldiers"—a status that has been most clearly defined in the handbooks on international war, but that will always remain a puzzle to the public at large. For a regular "prisoner of war" is your enemy, and you are allowed to hate him to your heart's content. But a merely "interned" soldier has never done you nothing (as the common saying was), so why lock him up behind a barbed-wire fence as if he were a wild animal? But if you did not lock him up, he would run away and that would cause endless international complications. So you locked him up, but you told him you really did not

mean it, and if he would only sign a little slip of paper, promising on his word of honor that he would not try and run away, you would give him the freedom of the city.

But the war was young. So were most of the interned officers. And beating the Dutch authorities at their own game became a delightful out-door and in-door sport, a game with definite rules of its own, like cheating the Internal Revenue officers of our own free land or bringing in a dozen cribs at an examination with a particularly difficult professor.

On the whole, this tug-of-war was harder on the keepers than on the prisoners, for in this case the jailor had no earthly reason to keep his unwelcome charges behind the bars, and the idea of shooting a man for such a harmless exploit as swimming a moat or digging a tunnel was of course out of the question. Finally, in their despair, the Dutch bethought themselves of two inaccessible spots, the strange little two-by-four island of Urk in the center of the Zuyder Zee (but one prisoner actually swam ashore!) and a forgotten fortress in the heart of the polderland, built two hundred years before to prevent the French from raiding Amsterdam.

The boredom in both places was indescribable. The poor inmates, rather than go crazy in the midst of so much water and mud and so many sad willow trees, bethought themselves of friends at home who had friends who once had known some one who had had a friend whose friends once upon a time knew a Dutchman. Armed with one of those long-distance letters of introduction, they established contacts. Then they signed the little slip of paper and, armed with this paper parole, they went forth into that bizarre war-time society of Holland, where people stoked their stoves with gigantic spit-balls made out of old newspapers and paid two dollars for a lemon



CHARLES MORGAN.

and fifty dollars for the last bottle of genuine Benedictine. And it is from one of these "contacts" that the moving love story which makes the plot of this book takes its origin.

I had always wondered why the peregrinations of these lost souls (four years out of their lives in the midst of absolutely strange surroundings!) should not have found a willing chronicler. Charles Morgan has become the Xenophon of these four thousand during their period of exile, and the biographer of the spiritual and emotional adventures of one of them among the Dutch. A charming and delightful and thoroughly civilized book, a piece of living history of a past that is as dead as the adventurer of Froissart.

As one of the survivors who knew both sides of the picture (an ambiguous and very uncomfortable position) I can state that he has done his task with admirable restraint and good taste. I even must have seen him. I dined one day at the old fort with the preposterous commander, the ruin of an excellent horseman who in his old days (long after the handsome blue uniform with the frogs had been cast aside) got mixed up in one of the inevitable post-war scandals of some "high