

literature—a fact which seems to escape those who try today to simplify the present ghastly conflict for purposes of political and economic propaganda. There are many Spains, but in the heyday of her history the mind of Spain expressed its unity, its enduring quality, in the great classics which are the subject of Mr. Bell's warm enthusiasm and authoritative scholarship. The unity of nationality and religion was the fundamental idea which held the divergent and warring elements of the Spanish people together in the characteristically Castilian rejection of Renaissance individualism. Nowadays we are witnessing the collapse of a beautiful structure from which the inner life had long since disappeared.

"Massiveness, balance, concentration and intensity are the means by which the Castilian excels his models and produces masterpieces which are at once glowing and substantial, passionate and austere, concrete and flamelike, condensing a copious power of invention and improvisation into a rich artistic unity." Such is Mr. Bell's definition of the essential genius of Castile. In turn he discusses the great writers in their relation to universalism, comprehensiveness, democracy, realism, and so forth, thus isolating their main qualities. His book, with its absence of references and learned paraphernalia, is evidently not for the uninitiated, but it will be welcomed by all who know Mr. Bell's forty years of service to the Peninsular literatures.

Ernest Boyd is the author of "Studies in Ten Literatures."

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Thomas à Becket

ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY. By Robert Speaight. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY DWIGHT SEDGWICK

THE author of this book, Mr. Robert Speaight, has won a well deserved reputation as an admirable actor in the part of Thomas à Becket, in T. S. Eliot's play, "Murder in the Cathedral." The play itself is remarkable, and came as a relief and consolation to those, who, bred upon ancient and stagnant ideas, had been bewildered by the joyous enthusiasm of young intellectuals over Mr. Eliot's poem, "Waste Land." The character of the Archbishop is brilliantly brought into high relief by the Four Tempters, and by the Chorus, which adds a mystical horror by its baroque and macabre lines:

I have tasted the living lobster, the crab, the oyster, the whelk and the prawn; and they live and spawn in my bowels. . . .

I have felt . . . the evasive flank of the fish.

It is this passage that comes back to me on reading Mr. Speaight's book, "I have felt the evasive flank of the fish," but not much more. I have not been able firmly to grasp a comprehension of the historical St. Thomas's character. I think the play has molded the biographer unduly. Medieval biography is difficult, the few facts handed down by chroniclers do not really

lend themselves to vertebrate structure. Mr. Speaight has rightly aimed to give us a spiritual picture, and has maintained a most successful restraint upon a natural admiration for a great man, who, in his struggle with King Henry II, represented the spiritual against the material. It is a very fair book, judicial and kindly. But I cannot help feeling that Mr. Speaight has so incorporated himself in Eliot's Becket, that he forgets the desire of commonplace men for a biography sufficiently commonplace as to be easily intelligible. His portrait, if one may take the analogy of tapestry, suggests that he has followed the portrait drawn by the chronicler of St. Alban's, as incorporated in Matthew Paris's "Chronica Majora," but with a special fashion of needlework, taught him by Mr. Eliot, weaving, as suggested by the chorus,

like a pattern of living worms
In the guts of the women of Canterbury.

Poetry has its own graces; but the especial virtue of a biographer is to study his materials, make up his mind as to the character of his hero, and present that image as definitely as he can. Here, with the best intentions in the world, the commonplace reader fails to get a definite picture of the Archbishop, or of the King. It is a little as if the poet of "The Waste Land" had touched this book with his poetical wand, and had rendered it a little more difficult to the non-intellectual to understand.

"Land-Locked Poet"

WILLIAM COWPER, HUMANITARIAN. By Lodwick C. Hartley. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER COWIE

THE trouble with a great deal of literary scholarship in America today is that it is concerned too little with the art of writing. When a scholar finds a subject, he trundles it into the laboratory (instead of following it to its lair) and submits it to measurements and tests. Worse still, he may decide to work on only one muscle, member, or nerve-circuit. He dissects, sorts, labels, and goes away (his subject still in the laboratory) to write a book in terms of evidence which no colleague or rival could seriously challenge. The whole process is analytical. The subject is never reintegrated despite the use of tidy summaries. Yet the essential art of a creative writer can be finally comprehended only by an effort of the imagination, and important "conclusions" must often be set forth tentatively in the form of opinion, without one shred of authority.

In Lodwick C. Hartley's admirably worked out study of Cowper we learn how high a content of humanitarianism was in the blood of the poet. This is important—but not very important. Mr. Hartley believes that earlier biographers have made too much of Cowper as an

amiable, isolated valetudinarian who poked in his garden, drank tea with unexciting females, and made intimates of rabbits. He has therefore assembled all the evidence for Cowper's humanitarianism under the heads of poor-relief, abolition, foreign missions, India, war, education, and the prevention of cruelty to animals. He honorably states facts which conflict with his thesis; but for all that, he has an air of trying to urge a conclusion more significant than is warranted. Cowper was neither original nor practical enough to be well characterized as a "fearless foe of oppression." The older biographers, who showed him as a "land-locked" poet, were intuitively right: drowsy days and tranquil evenings at Olney had more relationship with what is valuable in Cowper's poetry than those interludes during which he was sincerely roused by man's inhumanity to man.

Yet if Mr. Hartley is to some extent the victim of a system of scholarship, he has written a useful book. His study is packed with facts well organized and cogently presented. Historical background is marshaled with fidelity and skill: one is tempted to say that the chief value of this volume is its fine survey of the initial steps of the humanitarian movement in England. Only—some day all this new material, duly proportioned, should be brought under the same roof with the rest of the biographical material. Then we could have the complete Cowper.

Early Christianity

THE HISTORY OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY. By Johannes Weiss. Translated under the editorship of Frederick C. Grant. New York: Wilson-Erickson Inc.

THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES. By Kenneth Latourette. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1937. \$3.50.

THE THOUSAND YEARS OF UNCERTAINTY. The same. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by REINHOLD NIEBUHR

THE two-volume work by the famed New Testament scholar, Johannes Weiss, was brought out in German just before the outbreak of the World War. It had a definitive influence on New Testament scholarship and is to this day a valuable source book for specialists. Its translation was delayed longer than usual, probably because the war destroyed contact between German and Anglo-Saxon scholarship for some years. Though it is a book intended primarily for scholars, any thoughtful reader interested in its field of research will find it rewarding. Professor Weiss, with Albert Schweitzer, changed the whole course of New Testament criticism by making the apocalyptic element in the teachings of Jesus the principle of their interpretation rather than, as liberal scholars had believed, an incidental element in his thought.

Weiss is as resourceful and profound in dealing with the sources and characteristic emphases of the Pauline epistles as with the gospels. His book is consequently of permanent value, and Dean Grant and his collaborators are to be congratulated on the service they have rendered by this excellent translation.

The second, as well as the first, of Professor Latourette's ambitious six-volume history of Christianity has now been published. The publishers promise a new volume every eighteen months. Mr. Latourette's particular field is the expansion of Christianity in the period of the modern missionary enterprise. His first volume therefore is concerned with a vast realm of scholarship outside his field. The mastery of the material in this field represents a feat of prodigious diligence. Every competent work has apparently been consulted. The detailed problems of research are, however, consigned to treatment in the footnotes so that the general reader, for whom the work is intended, can stray into the bypaths of specific historical problems as much or as little as interest may dictate.

The difficulties with such an undertaking are that the collation of a vast mass of factual data on the expansion of the Christian religion seems to have obscured rather than revealed the inner meaning of the facts and recorded events. One witnesses the expansion of Christianity in the ancient world and is told that it annihilated the pagan religions of Rome more completely than any conquering religion. But one is at a loss to understand the inner genius of the movement. Whether Christianity is a religion of which Jesus may rightfully be regarded as the "founder" or whether it really has its beginning in a faith which is formu-

lated by St. Paul is a question which is raised but not answered. All of the critical problems are raised but not many are answered.

The second volume, covering the history of the world's only "Christian civilization," that is, the medieval culture, suffers particularly from Latourette's too atomistic approach. Since this was the particular age in the history of the West which was really dominated by Christianity, the important problem is to discover just what kind of an amalgam this Christianity was, what resources of Roman law, Greek philosophy, and Teutonic tribalism entered into it. The author offers us nowhere a broad perspective upon the whole sweep of thought and life in the medieval period. Instead he records interesting and significant historical events and then seeks to isolate the Christian influence upon these events. Frequently this is done in terms of analyzing particular characters, Dante, Aquinas, St. Francis, etc. in an effort to determine whether or not they were "Christian." This method leads to such curiously obvious verdicts as: "Dante is obviously the product of the Christianity of the Middle Ages." Even when movements rather than personalities are considered, the historical estimates are either too specific or too vague. It is for instance of no particular value to know that "the Renaissance had both Christian and anti-Christian manifestations." The question is, what was the real genius of the Renaissance, what its basic emphases, and in what respect are they derived from Christian and from classical sources or from an interesting combination of both.

It is of course too much to ask that one man should cover the history of the Western world and enter profoundly into the meaning of every period and the logic of development which leads from one period to another. Therefore it is enough to know that one man has mastered the surface and the detailed events of the whole Christian era in a remarkable feat of scholarship.

Doctor in Lapland

LAPLAND JOURNEY. By Halliday Sutherland. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by AGNES ROTHERY

LIKE people who prefer their meals served with all the courses put on the table together at the same time, so authors and publishers assume that "armchair travelers" prefer an informal diet mixed with conversation and description, information and personal anecdote, movement and meditation. Dr. Halliday Sutherland furnishes this menu acceptably in his "Lapland Journey" which, as the title indicates, is an account of his trip through Finland and Finnish Lapland. Train, motorbus, and reindeer sledge furnished his transportation: fishing for trout and salmon furnished part of his recreation. He saw and describes people and scenery, and is accurate in his historical and geographical data. Since he is an Englishman, it is natural that England and London should serve him as his norm of comparison, and American armchair readers will be indulgent to this.

Lighter than Air

WHAT ABOUT THE AIRSHIP? By Commander C. E. Rosendahl. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$3.50.

THERE must be something extraordinary about the English course at Annapolis. Every man who comes out of the place seems able to drive straight to the heart of the matter he is discussing in clean prose, without figures of speech. This time it is our first expert on rigid airships (both in time and merit), growing indignant about the shabby treatment the big gas bags have received in print and conversation. He points out that in spite of the *Hindenburg* disaster, airships remain the safest form of mechanical transportation yet devised by man, and the most rapid over long distances; that we should all be making transoceanic trips in them at this moment were it not for the unfortunate fact that the United States has a monopoly of the only suitable inflation material (helium), while Germany has a monopoly of the necessary technical skill. He faces every objection and answers it; devotes more space to the various airship accidents than any other writer and demonstrates that most of them have been due to official stupidity in over-riding the opinions of experienced airship men. The book has not the narrative interest of Captain Lehmann's on the same subject; but if enough Americans read it, the airship will probably be remanded down for a new trial.

THE MILTONIC SETTING

By E. M. W. TILLYARD \$2.75

Mr Tillyard defends Milton against the attacks of recent detractors and insists that he be considered against his proper background.

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