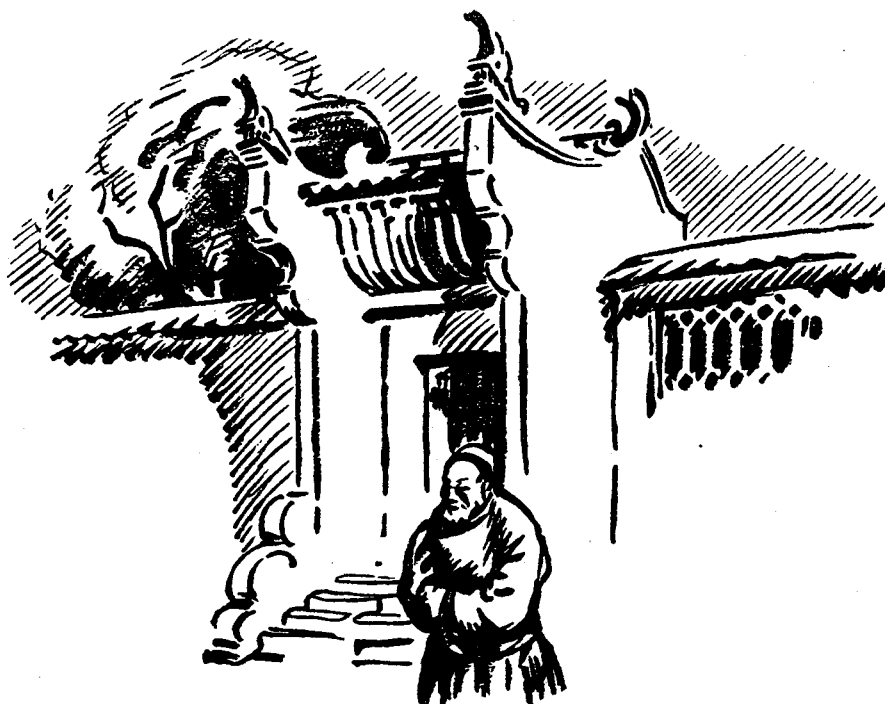


were partial, quick, darting; but more often than not they were brilliant, as full of sudden light, as they were incomplete. In the present volume there are descriptions of two authors, as different as possible from Virginia Woolf, that may help us towards defining her literary character and method. Writing of Gilbert White of Selbourne, she compares him to "a bird seen through a field glass busy in a distant hedge." And of Thomas Hardy she declares: "It was thus, perhaps, that Hardy's mind worked when it was most at its ease, flashing its light fitfully and capriciously like a lantern swinging in a hand, now on a rose-bush, now on a tramp frozen in a hedge." The busy bird, the lantern with its capricious, brief illuminations—these images, it seems to me, may well be used to describe and explain their maker.

Virginia Woolf's last book consists, for the most part, of quick glances at and glimpses of numerous literary and nonliterary objects. With her we glance at Goldsmith's style, pock-marked face, and life. And that busy bird, previously mentioned, Gilbert White. At Turgenev's novels, Ruskin's varied eloquence, and Hardy's work down to the publication of "Tess." She shows us Captain Marryat on his death bed and in his book. She draws for us a portrait of her father, Leslie Stephen, with skill and affectionate understanding. She discusses with us the cinema's possibilities (circa 1926), translates Sickert's paintings into literature, talks of Conrad, describes an imagined flight over London, turns the pages of Parson Woodforde's diary, gives us a governess's glimpse of life as it was lived at Devonshire House and Chatsworth at the end of the eighteenth century, escorts us to the Empire Exhibition at Wembley, pays a visit to her dentist, witnesses an eclipse of the sun, contemplates the lives of working-class women, and argues persuasively for the abolition of book reviewers. In yet another essay, already famous—"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"—she blames the Edwardian novelists for giving their Georgian successors no lights to steer by, and she asserts that Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett never looked "at life, never at human nature." In this paper she is, I think, witty, ingenious, and quite wrong. Stand her best characters beside the best of Bennett and Galsworthy and then decide who is better qualified—the Georgian or the Edwardians—to talk of life and human nature in fiction.

But then turn back to what Virginia Woolf could do so perfectly, to her own peculiar art, of which there are three or four fine examples in this final volume.



—From "The House of Exile."

Lo-t'ien, Poet, Politician & Scholar

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PO CHÜ-I. By Arthur Waley. New York: The Macmillan Co. 238 pp. \$3.50.

By JEREMY INGALLS

ARTHUR WALEY has explored more than 3,500 pieces of the verse and prose of Po Chü-i, the poet regularly known as Lo-t'ien. Correlating Po's works with the T'ang dynasty histories and anthologies in this indispensable biography, Waley has also provided the first thorough English study of late-eighth-century and early-ninth-century China. He also includes 100 translations from those of Po's poems not previously available in English.

Lo-t'ien was a tireless recorder of both large and small events in his experience as well as being an indefatigable reviser and arranger of his own writings. These he deposited in Buddhist libraries. His popularity among the Japanese as well as the Chinese insured preservation of his texts even when copies were lost during the persecution of the Buddhists and the great fire in Ch'ang-an.

In Waley's biography of Lo-t'ien the Western political scientist now has a quickly accessible record of the party struggles and "state department" negotiations of the poet's seventy-four years. The social historian is provided with materials on family codes, concubinage, friendships, the attitudes of government officials

toward deflation, inflation, public works, conscription, slavery, and the content and purpose of civil-service examinations, as well as evidence of the syncretic process in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thinking already far advanced 300 years before Chu Hsi's "Summa" of Chinese thought.

Lo-t'ien was a complex personality. His strong current of human kindness toward his family and friends and toward the socially and politically oppressed alternates with periods of ostensible indifference. His several rash, righteously indignant political gestures alternate with a wily prudence, which in old age preserved him from the demotions, exiles, and assassinations which swallowed up many of his acquaintance.

Though he flirted with Taoism as a young man and was in old age a convinced Buddhist, his theory of poetry remained strictly Confucian. He valued his didactic and expostulating verses, related to immediate social and political abuses, above his romantic verse narratives and lyric meditations. His versatility was regarded as a weakness by the "new criticism" of later dynasties but the fortunate preservation of almost all his work provides us perspective on a master-craftsman in the flexibilities and formalities of Chinese verse.

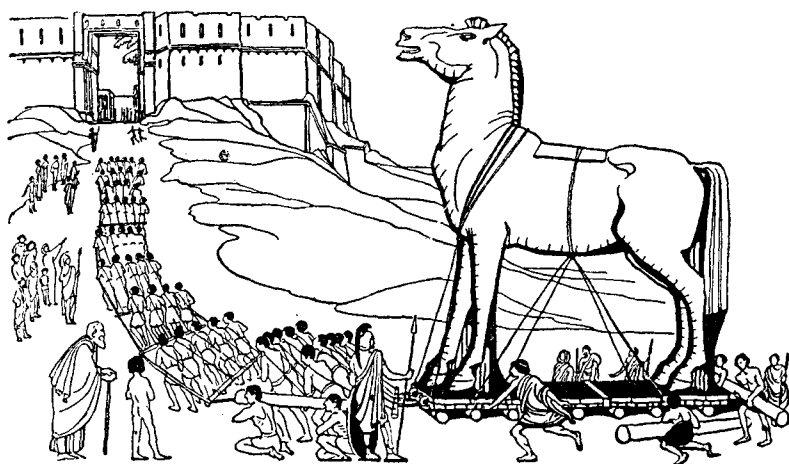
Waley's thorough study of the poet, politician, and scholar is well indexed and provided with several appendices, notes, reference tables, and map.

Trojan War Anew

THE ILIAD. Translated by Alston Hurd Chase and William G. Perry, Jr. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press-Little, Brown & Co. 470 pp. \$5.

By C. A. ROBINSON, JR.

ALMOST simultaneously with the appearance of this book there came from the Princeton Press the great publication of Troy by America's most distinguished prehistorian, C. W. Blegen. A short time ago A. J. B. Wace, the most distinguished prehistorian of England, produced his great book on Mycenae. Thus three-quarters of a century after Schliemann's epoch-making excavations the cities of Hector, tamer of horses, and of wide-ruling Agamemnon are fittingly described. And the well-informed general reader, who may be



—From "Builders of the Old World."

somewhat behind the times on the state of the classics, will be glad to hear further that more American undergraduates are studying ancient Greece than ever before in the history of our country.

In this same year, 1950, W. H. D. Rouse published his first-rate translation of the "Iliad." You can buy it, most fortunately, for 35¢—and yet the cold fact remains that Homer, in painting his enormous setting of space and destiny, involves entire peoples in overwhelming tragedy. What has been needed, therefore, at any reasonable price, is a great translation. This translation by Chase and Perry is, I believe, far more than the best to date; it is perhaps truly great.

Chase and Perry are aware that the "Iliad" moves in bone and muscle and accordingly they have given us a translation that is "colloquial" (Rouse's forte), at least in the sense that they have shunned archaism. But they also know their Greek and have a deep feeling for it and rhythm, and with great wisdom and taste have con-

trived a prose translation of poetic beauty that captures the passionate, vital dignity of the original. Their success lies partly in the recognition that the greatest poetry rises from the sweep of many lines and thus they have striven to reproduce these longer cadences through the greater rapidity of Homer's peculiar simplicity of speech. One example, from the parting of Hector and Andromache: "When in his passage through the great city he came to the Scaean gates, where he was about to pass through onto the plain, there his richly dowered wife came running to meet him. Andromache, the daughter of great-hearted Eëtion—Eëtion, who dwelt under wooded Placus in Thebe-under-Placus, ruling over the men of Cilicia." Rouse breaks this up, concluding: "Andromache was the daughter of Eëtion, the Cilician King, and her home was in Thebe, below the forest of Placus."

Homer describes neither the beginning nor the end of the Trojan War, but merely seven weeks during its tenth year. So great is his art, however, that he is able to develop three themes, until at the end they are joined in a harmony as the gods themselves enter the battle, and the martial chords rise in a crescendo of slaughter and superhuman strife, which ends abruptly in Hector's death. Chase and Perry believe that the revival of interest in the "Iliad" springs from our refusal to shun any longer, through romanticism or cynicism, the facts of war. They feel that the "Iliad" gives us profound descriptions of the pity and terror, the splendor and the squalor of war and of the nobility and baseness which it calls forth in men and women.

The general plan and structure of the poem, together with other helpful points, are presented in a dozen sensible pages of introduction. I suggest its perusal as one way of settling down to a beautiful and forceful rendering of the world's greatest epic.

From Poe to Welty

THE HOUSE OF FICTION: An Anthology of the Short Story with Commentary. Edited by Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 649 pp. \$5.

By WILLIAM PEDEN

MISS GORDON'S and Mr. Tate's collection of short stories from Poe and Hawthorne to Eudora Welty and Peter Taylor intends, its editors state, to represent an ample selection of the great writers of the impressionist school—the phrase is from Henry James—, which sets as its goal the rendering of a direct rather than a blurred impression of life. Henry James is the reigning deity of this school; James Joyce and Franz Kafka are its leading prophets. Miss Gordon and Mr. Tate, it need hardly be remarked, are extremely civilized and cultivated reader-critics; their selections, without exception, are distinguished. One might argue, however, for the inclusion of a story by a Sherwood Anderson or an A. E. Coppard in place of, or along with, the works of several more recent writers (this latter section, unquestionably, is the least satisfying of the entire volume).

The editors' analyses and criticisms of individual stories are occasionally irritating, frequently controversial, and always stimulating. Miss Gordon's and Mr. Tate's critical estimates appear to be based largely on the premise that the pronouncements of the master, Henry James, are to be accepted as ultimate truth and that all else be heresy. Further, the editors tend to identify their own critical evaluations with absolute fact and consequently are often unnecessarily dogmatic. Unequivocally, for example, they state that the three greatest stories in the English language are Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," James Joyce's "The Dead," and Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat." Hawthorne, they aver, "was never able to bring his craft to the pitch of perfection which Kafka attained"; Frank O'Connor "has not got the same kind of literary conscience" as James Joyce; Hemingway's symbolism is inferior to that of James, Kafka, and Joyce, and so on. As the opinions of two distinguished critics such comments deserve attention and respect, but categorical statements of fact they should not and they cannot be.

In all other respects "House of Fiction" is an admirable book, one of the best, perhaps the best, of several

(Continued on page 26)