

Torch and Crucible

The Life and Death of Antoine Lavoisier. By Sidney J. French. Pp. x+285. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1941.) 21s. 6d. net.

LAVOISIER, founder of modern chemistry, and one of France's greatest sons, has formed the subject of many biographical studies. Some of these have dealt mainly with his scientific achievements, others with his place in history. Mr. French has been very successful in his attempt to give a complete synthesis of this versatile and commanding figure in pre-Revolution France. Here we see Lavoisier not only as the inspired creator of a new chemistry, but also as one whose "active mind coordinated scientific genius, business efficiency, political vision, and public benefaction in a perfect harmony of tone". His domestic, social and political backgrounds are clearly outlined in the course of an easy, attractive—and, at times, dramatic—narrative; so are his relationships with Priestley, Cavendish (who is wrongly mentioned on p. 146 as "Lord" Henry Cavendish), and a galaxy of scientific men of his day.

The general reader should extract almost as much pleasure from this book as his scientific friends, and that is saying a great deal. Effective humanistic studies of the great figures of science are rare, and we owe a debt of gratitude to such writers as Mr. French. The appearance of this new study is a welcome herald of next year's bicentenary of Lavoisier's birth. The production of the book is sumptuous. The sole illustration is a charming reproduction on the paper jacket of David's painting of M. and Mme. Lavoisier. Unfortunately, the high price may prevent the book from attaining the wide circulation that it deserves among the lay public. J. R.

Magic and Natural Science in German Baroque Literature

A Study in the Prose Forms of the Later Seventeenth Century. By Frederick Herbert Wagman. (Columbia University Germanic Studies, No. 13.) Pp. vii+178. (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1942.) 15s. 6d. net.

IN this richly documented work, the author shows to what extent the German intellectual laity were influenced by contemporary scientific men, such as Galileo, Kepler, Bacon, Pascal and Jungius. The principal lay writers considered are Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, Georg Philipp Harsdörfer, the author of forty volumes of poetry and prose, Eberhard Werner Hoppel, the author of twenty "gallant" novels and a five-volume work on the wonders of the world, Erasmus Francisci, the compiler of compendia of curiosities, Christian Weise, an opponent of the scholasticism of German universities, Johann Riemer, Johann Beer, the author of eighteen novels and one of the most gifted writers of the seventeenth century, and Johann Christoph Grimmelshausen, the author of "Simplicissimus" and representative of Christian asceticism. The influence of the scientific writers of the age appears to have had various effects. In the first place there was a waning of medieval belief in miraculous intervention in Nature and the theological interpretation of phenomena, although remnants of occult lore were still present. Secondly, a dominant rationalistic tendency was shown by the belief that Nature is autonomous in its control over mundane and sidereal phenomena and free from intervention by either divine or diabolic agency.

Ethnographic Bibliography of North America

By George Peter Murdock. (Yale Anthropological Studies, Vol. 1.) Pp. xvi+168. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1941.) 12s. net.

THIS first number of a new series of anthropological studies sets a high standard for its successors. The author of the bibliography has been engaged in its compilation on and off for about twelve years and the result is comprehensive and most useful, covering as it does the aboriginal population of the whole of North America. The principle of classification by tribal groups was adopted, the norm being the "nationally self-conscious tribes of regions with some measure of political development, e.g., those of the Plains". Where this standard could not be obtained a number of tribelets or local groups on approximately the same linguistic or cultural plane were united under the name of one of them.

The difficulty of charting these divisions on a map was increased by the shifting of the tribes during three centuries, which necessitated a number of compromises. The boundaries shown are approximately those of the various groups at their first extensive contacts with Europeans, and thus they are not all valid at any single period, but represent a shifting date line.

The work is organized by areas, each containing general references followed by areal references to the tribes in alphabetical order, and comprising works on physical anthropology, linguistics and archaeology, as well as the more general ethnological works. The whole contains an astonishing bulk of literature dealing exhaustively with the anthropology of the whole sub-continent. K. RISHBETH.

The Furtherance of Medical Research

By Dr. Alan Gregg. (The Terry Lectures.) Pp. x+129. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1941.) 12s. net.

DR. ALAN GREGG, the distinguished director for medical sciences of the Rockefeller Foundation, has presented us with a thoughtful and stimulating work in the form of three lectures devoted respectively to a description of medical research, universities and foundations in relation to such research, and the medical research worker. In the first lecture he points out that research in any field comprises a series of activities consisting in selecting, observing, recording, comparing, analysing and classifying phenomena and finally drawing suitable conclusions, each of which contributes to, but cannot be substituted for, the whole process. In the second lecture Dr. Gregg maintains that, compared with a Government's subsidizing of research, foundations can much more easily work outside national boundaries and support the demonstration of theories which are not sufficiently widely accepted to qualify for Government support. Moreover, foundations can pay larger salaries than a Government is capable of doing. The third lecture contains a sympathetic account of the uphill struggle of the young research worker.

There are two appendixes consisting respectively of an outline docket film and an outline for presenting a proposal for a capital grant for building an institute.