BOOKS and REVIEWS

The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats

383 pp. New York. Doubleday Anchor Book. $1.25.

Reviewed by
HERB FISHER

Doubleday has provided a fine addition to its illustrious Anchor collection with the publication of "The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats."

This is a collection of autobiographical essays revealing the great poet's intellectual and emotional development. It is more an autobiography of ideas than it is a chronicle of events in a man's life.

Yeats was a leading figure in a flourishing period of Irish letters during the days of hottest conflict with England. His view spans the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th.

HE TRACES the passions, the debates, the obsessions of this literary renaissance and the figures who dominated the drama—Synge, Wilde, Moore, O'Casey, Maud Gonne and others of Ireland's "Tragic Generation."

In "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth", the first essay, Yeats describes the youthful miseries of a sensitive, artistic nature. Under the influence of his free-thinking father, an incredible man who urged his son never to think of the future or of practical results, this artistic sensitivity ripened.

The poet's entire life was a struggle to master his passions, to bring them under control of his pen.

AMONG his passionate concerns were, of course, the Irish political movement and the Irish theatre through which he, Synge, Moore and others dramatized their convictions.

But of greatest interest is Yeats' enchantment with occultism — his youthful dream of a Unity of Being wherein all minds flow into one another; the obsession with "traditional experience", a kind of telepathic contact below normal consciousness creating a cultural oneness in which all minds are united.

Fascinating are the examples given by Yeats of his own "telepathic contacts".

This book does not read easily. The writer is a poet; his abstractions and allusions reach into a fairly heavy poetical liturgy. The importance of the book lies in its reflections of the thought-origins of the man and his work.

Chez Pavan

By Richard Llewellyn. 572 pp. New York. Doubleday. $4.95.

Reviewed by
FRED BAHR

For over a century Chez Pavan has stood for the finest in hotels. As did his grandfather, Monsieur Pavan maintains the standards by Prussian discipline sharpened with Gallic sarcasm.

Each waiter is a master at his trade. The wine steward is an encyclopedia of vineyard knowledge. Each chambermaid sees all that is necessary and nothing more.

Unfortunately, into this last bastion of life in the grand manner has crept the specter of the 20th century. The unassimilated ruling families of Europe are in financial straits; taxes have dampened the millionaires on both sides of the Atlantic; the younger employees are wooed by the siren, Trade Unionism.

THE ONLY hope of the old guard with Monsieur Pavan growing old is Charles. From bus boy in a small Swiss inn, Charles has risen to master of the restaurant and then to manager.

Though young in mind and body, only he can provide the leadership to keep Mlle. Cimiga Pavan, the heir apparent, from turning the hotel into a high grade hot dog stand.

Monsieur Charles is the flesh and blood central figure of Llewellen's book. But the principal and most interesting figure is the hotel itself. Its flesh and blood are the mortals who serve or are served there. Its spirit is its own.

THERE ARE side themes. Charles has been in love with an Arab dancing girl in Algiers. His current passion is torn between Mademoiselle Pavan and the florist and is tempted by innumerable other women. Other Parisian restauranteurs and bistro owners are introduced, but the reader's interest in each side episode is in direct proportion to its relation to the one and only Chez Pavan.

The story is told through the mind and eyes of Charles, whose disciplined emotions make an excellent viewing screen. It is a fascinating and well-told story.

A Mixture of Frailties

By Robertson Davies. 379 pp. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons. $3.95.

Reviewed by
ROBIN BAHR

Mrs. Bridgetower's will disappointed the expectations of many; especially those of her only son Solomon, and at the same time, placed Solomon in a rather embarrasing position. The will provided that the entire income from the Bridgetower estate be spent on the education of a young Canadian girl in the arts, to be selected by the executors of the estate, until and unless Solomon produced a male heir.

Solomon, duly married but childless, is the object of much speculation and pressure, for all the executors of the estate are also promised a share if and when a son appears. In the meantime, however, there is nothing to do but abide by the will, so the executors finally select a colorless candidate, Monica Gall, to be recipient of the scholarship.

THE MAIN PART of the book concerns Monica's year in London. Her voice develops beyond expectations, but it on her development as a person that our attention is focused.

In less than a year Monica has met and become involved with some of London's most distinguished musicians, as well as a number of its most notorious crackpots, has had an affair with a brilliant young composer, and has helped finance a new opera. She has met each new experience with increasing confidence, sophistication and maturity.

The story has been written lightly for asmusement. The people are generally characters with exaggerated peculiarities and frailities — always exposed, sometimes amusingly so. The episodes are just as unlikely, sometimes downright impossible.

But the credulity of both are not important. What is important is that the people and situations are more often eccentric than funny, and thus, as a humorous book, it misses its mark.

Hell's Kitchen

By Richard O'Connor. Philadelphia & New York. J. B. Lipincott Co. $4.95.

Reviewed by
TOM PHILLIPS

"Hell's Kitchen . . . once was a quiet nook of Manhattan Island," New York newspaperman Richard O'Conor writes as he begins to unfold his lusty account of the now infamous section of Manhattan.

But that was many years ago and from shortly before the Civil War to near contemporary times the area "between 14th and 52nd Streets, and Eighth Avenue and the North River, and the old Tenderloin just east of it" was known as one of the roughest, toughest, most sinful, depraved and corrupt sections of any American city.

The wrecker's ball has changed that in recent times but the reputation still clings, and it is this reputation which O'Connor evokes in his tightly-written volume of social history.

AND O'CONNOR does a fine job of recreating the old tenement days in which Bully Morrison strode the area's wretched and wicked streets, plucking "a lamppost out of the sidewalk and wielding it as a shillelagh."

Bully's companions are given equal space. There was Pegleg Gordon, a fearsome fighter who would unscrew his detachable leg to use with fearsome consequences in battle; Euchre Kate Burns, the "champion heavyweight female brick hurler of the district," and Battle Annie Welsh, "the harridan-in-chief of Battle Row."

O'Conor writes of the life and times of these and other equally fascinating and fearful characters who prowled the district with color and fervor.

"Hell's Kitchen" is a carefully researched and documented book At times the author allows his enthusiasm to carry him away, but for the most part it is interesting reading about a time now past but not forgotten.