

THE STATISTICAL STUDY OF LITERARY VOCABULARY. By G. Udney Yule. (Cambridge University Press; 25s.)

The writing of this work has obviously been a labour of love, and we can but marvel at the prodigious amount of work and patient investigation which made it possible.

Students have long been familiar with the fact that certain words or grammatical forms are characteristic of the writings of an author at some period of his literary activity and may be used as tests of authenticity or for the purpose of fixing the date of some particular work. Dr. Yule has endeavoured to generalize this test by statistical methods based on the frequency distributions of the words used by different authors, i.e. the measure in which a very small proportion of the total number of words they employ tends to predominate more or less in their style. Thus e.g. in the *De Imitatione Christi* nouns occurring thirty times or more only form 5 per cent. of all the nouns used in that work (60 out of a total of 1,168), but they account for roughly half of the times any noun is used (4,185 out of a total number of occurrences of nouns 8,225). It is possible by statistical methods to obtain a general formula which will, within certain limits, represent this tendency in any given author; and investigations on the *Imitation*, on certain works of Thomas a Kempis and others of John Gerson, and in English of Macaulay and Bunyan, show that the value given by this formula in each case is, in fact, characteristic of the writer under consideration; and a comparison of the figures shows that whereas between Gerson and the author of the *Imitation* there is a wide discrepancy, this is by no means the case as between the latter writer and Thomas a Kempis.

Dr. Yule, while giving full explanations for the benefit of the mathematically minded, does not lose sight of the needs of the general reader, and no knowledge of higher mathematics is required to enable the latter to understand the argument used.

Further investigation deals with the use of certain special classes of nouns used by these authors, e.g. nouns not found in the Vulgate, non-classical Latin nouns and certain nouns of Greek derivation; in each case the proportion of such nouns and of their use was found to be distinctly higher in the case of Gerson than in that of the other two writers. Another line of argument concerns certain distinctive words used by these authors. Taking the nouns most frequently used in the *Imitation*, it is found that whereas there is a close resemblance between this work and those of Thomas a Kempis, the resemblance is much less-marked between the *Imitation* and Gerson. The author works out this part of the enquiry first by general reasoning and then with regard to certain specific nouns. Lastly, a comparison of 'associations' i.e. the presence (or absence) of given nouns in one writer and their presence (or absence) in another, is worked out and leads to a similar conclusion, viz., a great likeness between the vocabularies of the *Imitation* and

Thomas a Kempis, and a comparative unlikeness in those of the pairs *Imitation-Gerson* and *Thomas a Kempis-Gerson*.

The work was originally undertaken as a contribution to the controversy on the authorship of the *Imitation*, and the results obtained show that whoever he may have been, it was not Gerson. The limitations of the method are shown by the fact that no more positive conclusion can be reached by its use. The general reader who takes the trouble to work through the book will get a useful insight into statistical method and will learn a large number of interesting facts concerning the vocabularies of Macaulay and Bunyan, and even of Basic English. In spite of the austerity of the subject-matter the style is fresh and the manner often amusing. Those with any taste for questions of authenticity or of the details of literary style, if they are willing to exercise a little perseverance, will find this a most interesting book.

ANTONINUS FINILI, O.P.

THE OLIVE AND THE SWORD. By G. Wilson Knight. (Humphrey Milford: 6s.)

With 'The Olive and the Sword' Mr. Wilson Knight has added to his work of Shakespearian analysis a volume on Shakespeare's conception of England at war. It is a straightforward example of the author's familiar method showing the predominant symbolism disengaged from surrounding distractions, but by no means isolated from the relevances of plot and context. We thus have something from the field of Mr. Knight's greatest achievement combined with one of his chief enthusiasms. The book is in a sense an essay in anthropology, an examination of one of the principal English myths, the myth of St. George and the Dragon.

In the chapter 'Roses at War' on the three parts of Henry VI, we are shown 'the patriotic Henry VI, himself a weakling,' watching a battle and expressing his pity for mankind at odds with itself, in the words:

'Wither one rose and let the other flourish;
If you contend a thousand lives must wither.'

Nevertheless war is seen to be a natural feature of all the visible creation, and the paradox of this sequence of plays is acknowledged and summed up in the words: 'The blood of the slain is felt by relative or supporter, as a rich, sweet, potent yet piteous thing. Neither side has any monopoly of these images: the terrible Margaret can be as pathetic as anyone.' Chosen as the central comment is the king's speech comparing the shepherd's life and that of royalty. That paradox taken in connection with that comment show that at this stage the poet's vision turns to a solution of contentment with personalities and societies in which the opposing forces are but little differentiated. As Mr. Knight puts it, 'in Henry VI . . . the victims' supporters . . . though violent, are, in a deeper sense, all