

Books of Special Interest

The Vials of Voodooism

BLACK MAGIC. By PAUL MORAND. Translated from the French by HAMISH MILES. New York: The Viking Press. 1929. \$3.

Reviewed by UFFINGTON VALENTINE

PAUL MORAND'S attitude towards the negro is typically Gallic in its absence of those prejudices which are apt to enter into our own view of him. His book consists of a group of negro studies which gain value from the detachment of their author, and which had their inception in the fascination exerted upon him by jazz. Drawn by the ineluctable urge of the music he traveled over half the globe and visited nearly two score negro countries. The knowledge of negro nature and the occult powers that possess it gained from his wanderings he has set down in this book.

Unstinted pains are not, however, always attended by adequate reward. The voodooism that M. Morand divined lay at the background of jazz largely remained, despite his assiduous efforts to uncover its sources, the mystery it was to him before he set forth on his journeying. What one finds in "Black Magic" is not an interpretation of voodooism, but merely a vivid dramatization of its effects. However, the volume is not meant to be a scientific exposition of negro thaumaturgics, and perhaps one should not complain if the revaluation of the negro's soul is not what might be expected from the writer's contacts with it under such varied circumstances. At best, research into the spiritual make-up of primitive natures leads to *impasses*; their depths are instinctively guarded. What such research has for the most part brought to light is the fear-motive that dominates the primitive mind, the belief in the inimicalities of life, in an evil power that must be propitiated and thwarted.

This Paul Morand realizes and he has made it the thesis of the first story of his volume. In it he demonstrates the persistence of fear as a spiritual dominant even in evolved negro types subjected to highly civilized in-

fluence. The story revolves about a Louisiana-born negress whose dancing has made her the idol of Paris. The triumph of her position, all that she has imbibed from white surroundings, falls away under the atavistic terror aroused by discovering a "voodoo hand" in her bed. She seeks the evil-warding prophylactics of a witch-doctor, goes to a negro sabbat, and there, thrown into hypnosis, she receives an ominous message from her dying grandmother that carries her back to her birthplace, where the shadows of voodooism close in on her. In a spasmodic endeavor to defy them she takes a Mississippi ferry-boat, with the intention of returning to Paris. But voodooistic forewarning confirms itself. She is drowned in the river. The story has more of the accessories of negro necromancy and its preventatives than appear elsewhere in the book.

The second tale is one to which Americans are likely to take exception, though it is inferable that Paul Morand classes the woman who figures in it among the psychoneurotics rather than holds her typical of American femininity. The story plays on the French Riviera, where a negro, a band leader at a casino, is found on the roadside riddled with bullets, with a paper having the words "Respect for White Women! K. K. K.," pinned to his shirtfront, and in his arms a white woman from Charleston, South Carolina. The story is in large part a monologue of self-justification on the woman's part, with interjections by her auditor that bring out frankly the clashing American and French points of view about miscegenation and all that pertains to it. There is much food for thought in the story. Though written in a polemical vein, it is as dramatically effective as any in the volume.

American feeling in regard to the negro is the subject of two other stories. In both is unsparingly presented the persecution that is the fate of the educated, well-mannered, white-skinned members of the negro race who have sought social acceptance in white circles. The negro's facile reversion to race primitiveness is the theme of a third story, "Syracuse, or the Panther-Man." That M.

Morand entertains doubt of the negro's value as a factor of civilization may be deduced from the outstanding story of the group, "The Black Tsar," in which, in the vein of Swift's *Voyages of Gulliver*, he creates a future negro-ruled West Indian republic. In Occide, its hero, he apparently forecasts what, in his opinion, would be the result of dominance by the negro. "Absolute power intoxicates him," he says. "It gives reign to his instincts, and his will to power explodes."

A Way of Life

NATURAL CONDUCT. By EDWIN BINGHAM COPELAND. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. 1929. \$3.50.

Reviewed by RALPH M. EATON
Harvard University

Darwin did not extend his theory of the evolution of species through the elimination of the unfit into the moral field, and Thomas Huxley, his great contemporary, protested vigorously against the idea that "the survival of the fittest" has an ethical significance. But many social philosophers of the nineteenth century drew moral corollaries from Darwinism, believing that a "scientific" ethics had at last been discovered. Mr. E. B. Copeland's "Natural Conduct" lays down these corollaries again with the same conviction that ethics can be made simple and scientific, being founded on something more tangible than an aspiration toward a good that no man can define. The arguments against Darwinism in morals are thickly sewn through the ethical writings of the last sixty years; Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics" is probably the best of all. Mr. Copeland considers no arguments against his position. He puts forward without question the following premises, that "practical ethics is an application of biological science," "Good conduct is all conduct favorable or conducive to survival"; "the basic principle is that, under any possible set of conditions, the best conduct will be that which tends most effectively toward the permanence of life"; "every virile race of men hopes and tries to live forever. Each generation is ambitious to be followed by a succession of generations of descendants growing more numerous as time passes, and to insure a chance for these descendants to live. This ambition is the basic motive which underlies our conduct."

The picture of a world populated by tribes of human beings struggling to perpetuate themselves, practising the virtues of temperance, courage, monogamy, in order that other human beings may perpetuate themselves and practise these virtues and so give birth to numerous and strong progeny, is Mr. Copeland's idea of perfection. The manner of life of bacteria is frequently mentioned, but the reader is not reminded that after the races of men have disappeared from the earth a few triumphant germs will remain; they will have proved themselves the fittest to survive.

Sheer life is not the goal of life. The fragile values of poetry, friendship, beauty, and knowledge for the sake of knowledge are worth a million organisms writhing and procreating in the grip of the will to live. Mr. Copeland quotes from Aristotle, "but surely the good of things is that which preserves them," and neglects to speak of Aristotle's conception of the highest good, disinterested contemplation of the universe, a complete detachment from the struggle for life, akin to the vision of the poet or the mystic.

An ethics of this type reduces itself to tautologies. The author sometimes uses the term "good" as if it had a significance in itself, which most people suppose that it has; and then he turns his statements into tautologies, robbing them of their meaning, by his definition of "good." "A race which practices habits that are bad—a bad habit is one which endangers survival—will be exterminated, and the bad habit will go with it. A race with good habits—a good habit is one conducive to survival—will be preserved, by virtue of its good habits." In other words, a race that practises habits that endanger survival will not survive, and one that practises habits conducive to survival will survive. The plain moral fact is that a very good race may perish and a wicked one live on, for the most powerful is not necessarily the best.

To those who can accept the premises the book will be an honest and simple presentation of a way of life close to nature; to those who cannot accept the premises it will have missed the whole point of man's struggle for a distant perfection.

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Foreign Literature

The Social Gospel

THE BACKGROUND OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN AMERICA. By W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT. Haarlem. 1928.

Reviewed by H. D. HILL

IT has become a fashionable truism that Puritanism is superannuated. In contrast with the Puritan preoccupation with the individual, its introspection upon sin and the horrors of hell and its feeling of awe before a remote and terrible God, the modern mood favors a social gospel in which the relationships of the individual and not his inner life are the primary objects of consideration and in which an evolutionary optimism believes in the Christianization of all aspects of our democratic mass society with the aid of an interested and accessible God. It is demonstrably true that the social gospel, with its relation to "welfare" and "service" as ideals, has permeated the present community in a fashion parallel to the generalized influence of Puritanism in the New England world. Puritanism was the aggressive mood of the early years of the eighteenth century; the ideal of the social gospel is that of the beginning of the twentieth. It is a reflection of the American tendency to accept change and forget continuity that no American writer has made an attempt to trace the events of the transition from one to the other as a history of the religious development of a nation. Such a study is now at hand, from a Dutch student who has passed considerable time in the United States.

The definition of the social gospel with which Mr. 't Hooft starts is that of Mr. Shailer Matthews, "the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and the social institutions such as the state, the family, as well as to individuals," but he suggests that it is "more than an application of Christian principles to society; it is also an application of social principles to Christianity; or to put it shortly: it is a form of interpenetration of religious and social thought." And he sets himself to discover the steps by which this type of gospel, which he regards as a distinctively American manifestation, developed on the new continent out of a variety of European backgrounds. He treats the subject under the headings of The Puritan Background; the Contribution of the Enlightenment; the Contribution of Revivalism; the Contribution of Science.

If one were to select the most interesting sections of his study they might perhaps be these. It is an arresting fact to learn how far back the kernel of modernism is to be found. Critics of Puritanism ordinarily ignore that if the theology of Jonathan Edwards voiced in general the ideas of the Puritans who considered themselves "sinners in the hands of an angry God," it nevertheless contained elements of the mood which was to follow two hundred years later,—"God in seeking His Glory, seeks the good of His Creatures; because the emanation of His Glory (which He seeks and delights in, as He delights in Himself and His own eternal glory) implied the communicated excellency and happiness of His creatures." The existence of these two phases of Edwards's philosophy is not a discovery of Mr. 't Hooft, but the emphasis which he places upon the second is illuminating.

There is one point, moreover, at which the book breaks ground that is quite new, namely its treatment of the influence of the Enlightenment on American thought, its importation through such men as Jefferson and Franklin, and its permeation of the religious sphere. He considers that the this-worldly orientation of the rationalist view of life had at least three results which contributed to the coming social gospel; it shifted the ruling emphasis from theology to ethics; it began a deliberate substitution of humanistic for transcendent elements in theology; and it brought about a distinctly new and optimistic view of human nature, which was subsequently strengthened by the evolutionary aspect of the organic sciences.

But Mr. 't Hooft does more than trace the background of the social gospel. In his final chapter he deduces from the writings of the movement an outline of its theology, and offers a critique of its assumptions. The failure of the movement to define its God directly has been perhaps one of its significant characteristics: it has conceived Him to be so immanent in the social relations of men that an analysis of Him as "other" has not appeared necessary. Mr. 't Hooft quotes the summary of Professor M. C. Otto in

saying that "It is inevitable that America, historically the foremost exponent of the democratic 'urge' and 'outreach' of the universe, and only yesterday the leader in making the world safe for democracy, shall presently engage in the larger task of making God safe for democracy. This is the heart of the new theology," and supports it with the following citation from Rauschenbusch. "The worst thing that could happen to God would be to remain an autocrat while the world is moving on towards democracy!" He ends with questioning whether a God that does not offer a contrast to the problems in which society is involved, and a God belief in whom is not primarily a matter of personal faith, can be the source of a gospel, even a social gospel.

The book is definitely a contribution to the history of American thought; its appraisal of the interaction of the various forces in the development of religious ideas is a matter of considerable subtlety. One element is perhaps underrated, the economic. There are two aspects in which it possibly deserves rather more consideration than Mr. 't Hooft sees fit to give it. The very fact that the wealth of a new continent made the conditions of life less rigorous than in Europe has tended to make the sweat of the brow aspect of the Fall less real to succeeding generations than it was to the Puritans, and contributed to the confusion between God's Own Country and Eden expressed in the social gospel. Beyond that, the wholehearted devotion of the American to the capitalization of the resources around him may be claimed to have produced a this-worldly orientation of his thoughts independently of any intellectual stimulus: there is a rationalism which derives from the hand and the eye as well as that which comes from the mind. But we continually hear a great deal, and perhaps enough, of these things. What we hear about less frequently, and the fact the analysis of which makes this work worth while, is the process by which God and the world are equated in the explanation of life offered by the dominant group in contemporary religion, and the extent to which this equation, by destroying a necessary contrast, takes away the most profound dynamic in spiritual achievement.

A Night of Fear

LÉVIATHAN. By JULIEN GREEN. Paris: Plon. 1929. 12 francs.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

THE Franco-American literary phenomenon that is Julien Green is by now sufficiently well known on both sides of the Atlantic to lend considerable interest to the appearance of his third novel, which has just been published in French.

Like all of his books, "Léviathan" is gloomy, but, unlike "Avarice House" and "Adrienne Mesurat," it is also complicated in plot and somewhat obscure and difficult in construction. Briefly, the subject is as follows: A young professor, Paul Guéret, unhappily married, leaves Paris to settle with his wife in a small provincial town, where he has received a position as agent for one of the great landholders of the district, M. Grosgeorge. The atmosphere of the place and the character of his employer and his wife, rich, vulgar, and thoroughly hypocritical, combine to make his life miserable. He turns for consolation to a young girl of the town, Angèle. Nominally a laundress, this curious person serves in reality as a kind of decoy employed by the proprietress of a restaurant to draw clients and keep them interested by her personal charms. Through Angèle all the gossip of the town reaches this woman, Mme. Londe, who plays an important part in the story, and is a kind of personification of curiosity in its most highly developed state. Her interest in the restaurant is thus less founded on pecuniary bases than on a consuming desire to keep in contact with all that goes on in the neighborhood. When Guéret learns through her and her clients what Angèle's real occupation is, a violent scene of jealousy ensues, culminating in his striking her. At the sight of her blood-stained face he is overtaken by panic terror, and rushes away to spend the night in flight through the streets of the little town, as if already pursued by his crime.

This night of fear is the most extraordinary thing in "Léviathan," and one of the most successful things Green has yet done. In his flight Guéret encounters an old beggar, imagines he is being followed, and threatened by him. His mad panic in-

creasing, he kills the man, and finally hides till morning in a coal yard. The horrors of this scene, improbable as they are in reality, are conveyed with such power, at once macabre and realistic, that in the end they convince by sheer despotic force. At last he seeks refuge in his room refusing to emerge under any circumstances.

A break in the narrative carries the reader back to Angèle, who has been forced to give up her relations with Mme. Londe, as Guéret's blows have permanently disfigured her. The neighbors and the police are suspicious of Guéret, but she refuses to denounce him. Mme. Londe begins to lose her clients, attempts to train another girl to take Angèle's place, finally beseeches Angèle to return. But at this point the figure of Mme. Grosgeorge, hitherto unimportant, appears in the foreground. She is not unattractive, she is bored, she hears mysterious rumors about Guéret. . . . Determining to protect him, she seeks his confidence, and when the police finally come to arrest him, hides him in her house. His safety seems assured, but when she is about to arrange his escape, Mme. Grosgeorge discovers that he still loves Angèle and in a fury of jealousy denounces him to the police. The end is swift and tragic. Guéret is caught

as he attempts to flee, Mme. Grosgeorge tries to kill herself, and Angèle, who has also been trying to save her lover, is brought home in delirium to die. Mme. Londe presumably continues to satisfy her curiosity with new scandals.

The book has several unmistakable weaknesses, particularly in construction. For example, Guéret's wife, who is often mentioned in the beginning, drops entirely out of the picture thereafter. The motivation of certain changes of mind on the part of Mme. Grosgeorge and Angèle is obscure, too, but the brutality of the story and the splendor of the writing are sufficient to wipe out such petty faults. The atmosphere is unreal at times, yet it must be acknowledged that (like innumerable first-rate novelists before him) Green creates his own world and his own people, sharpening thereby the impression which his books never fail to make. Indeed, there is a quality about Julien Green's work in such passages as the night scene of this book that is beyond almost all Frenchmen of his generation. To find a fitting parallel it is necessary to return to the Anglo-Saxon literature of the past century, to Poe, Dickens, and Hawthorne. In the best sense his books may be said to be old fashioned.

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