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The New Religion of Nationalism

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD
SINCE 1918. By J. Hampden Jackson.
Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by RAYMOND J. SONTAG

PROBABLY because almost all books on recent history become antiquated within a year or two, Mr. Jackson's publishers state that, while based on "The Post-War World" which appeared four years ago, this is "virtually a new book." It is not. Not only the material on the years from 1918 to 1935, but even the conclusions of the earlier book, are here reprinted practically unchanged. Mr. Jackson has merely added a survey of events since 1935. The remarkable fact is that he needed to do no more to produce the best short interpretative history of the last two decades.

Throwing overboard the liberal hope that nationalism was a passing madness, Mr. Jackson has made the spread and intensification of nationalism throughout the world the center of his story. Like all religions, he argues, nationalism has its dark, irrational side. He gives proper emphasis to the efforts of social groups to use nationalism for their own selfish purposes. "Yet nationalism, and nationalism alone in our generation, has kept alive the sense of social pride and independence and the instinct for continuity with the past, without which all political associations are hollow."

Guided by this conviction, he has written a book which has coherence, as well as one which has the usual virtue of confidence in the future. He faithfully sets down the excesses of Fascists, Nazis, and Bolsheviks, but he looks behind and beyond the excesses to discover how the people of Italy, Germany, and Russia got that way. In studying Russia he is less concerned with Communist theory than with the purposes driving on the Russian people, and he concludes that the revolution in Russia was "one of the many Oriental revolutions against the exploitation of the Western Powers and of the privileged classes." In studying Italy and Germany, he brushes aside the plots of capitalists as irrelevant details: "The theory that emerges from these pre-Fascism conditions and post-Fascism practices is that man desires national unity more than liberty, and strength before toleration—national unity and strength being attainable only by the subordination of all activities to the State."

Throughout the world the upsurge of this new religion of nationalism is traced. The result is a coherent and vivid picture, the colors of which are still fresh today, and into which the events of the last four years have been skillfully incorporated. It is a picture which should be studied by those groping to understand the past and despairing of the future. They will come away with new understanding and new confidence.

Raymond J. Sontag is professor of history at Princeton.

Ideologies

POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE EUROPEAN TRADITION. By J. P. Mayer in cooperation with R. H. S. Crossman, P. Kecskemeti, E. Kohn-Bramstedt, C. J. S. Sprigge. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. \$4.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

A GROUP of men can run a business, or a college, or a football team; indeed you cannot think of these except as group enterprises. It is, however, very hard, if not impossible, for a group of men to write a book. Of the dozens of collaborative works of our time, beginning with the "Cambridge Modern History," very few have been full successes, unless indeed they frankly pretended to be no more than anthologies or collected studies. Mr. Mayer and his collaborators have certainly aimed in this book at a kind of unified treatment of what they call the European tradition in political thought, and they have, in spite of their common sympathies for "democratic" as opposed to "totalitarian" states, certainly failed to bring it off. Their book is spotty and uneven, not merely because the contributors vary in their ability to write, but also because they vary in what they write about as "political thought."

Mr. Mayer, who accounts for perhaps half the book—political thought in the Western world from the Greeks through the seventeenth century, in modern Germany, in modern Russia, and finally a brief Epilogue—is himself subject to such variation as to lead one to doubt whether he is one man or several. His work on ancient and medieval thought is a rather confused bit of scissors-and-paste editing, usually from impeccable sources, but lacking in neatness and authority; his chapter on German political thought is excellent, particularly in its interweaving of German history with German ideas; his chapter on Russian political thought is unduly brief and non-committal. Mr. Crossman contributes one of the best chapters in the book, though it is hardly in line with the others. He provides nothing like a history, or even a sketch, of political thinking in England, but a provocative series of very general reflections on the Englishman as a political animal and on England's place in the history of our Western society. He belongs to the liberalism-is-dead-what-shall-we-put-in-its-place school nowadays so popular among English intellectuals; but here he specifically repudiates Laski's Marxism and Aldous Huxley's pacifism as being no more than "emotional reactions to crisis." Mr. Kohn-Bramstedt's chapter on France is the best bit of expositional writing in the book, always careful to keep ideas in the historical setting where they belong, and avoiding both extremes of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism in his treatment of the role of ideas in life. Mr. Kecskemeti does not rise beyond the level of competence in his chapter on the United States, and Mr. Sprigge sometimes falls rather below that level in his treatment of modern Italian political thought.

This is hardly the book to compete with Mr. Sabine's recent "History of Political

Theory"—though comparison with that admirable book implies a very high standard indeed. But it has at least two virtues. It is largely the work of scholars of Central European background, and in its notes and bibliographies it brings to American readers a host of names, many of which have not yet penetrated as far as they deserve to into the minds of educated Americans. And, confused and uneven though it is, the book does help bring home the fact that what we may call loosely Western democracy has a long tradition of far greater intellectual respectability than any similar tradition the totalitarian states may appeal to.

Astral Fluid

SIGHT UNSEEN: A JOURNALIST VISITS THE OCCULT. By Frederick G. Lieb. New York: Harper & Bros. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JOHN MULHOLLAND

ANYONE who follows baseball will already know Mr. Lieb, whose sports column was a feature in many papers for years, it seems that during the several decades when he spent his afternoons in the press boxes of ball parks, his spare time was occupied in studying the more spectacular forms of religion. This book is an account of what he found and the conclusions he has reached. His book throughout its two hundred and fifty pages is most interesting, although it must be noted that some readers, partisan in their religious beliefs, probably will have apoplexy.

He believes that unclean spirits from the other world do possess weakened minds; that "concentrated thought sent out on the earth's magnetic waves, especially by those schooled in black magic, can have most deleterious effects"; that some Gypsy fortune-tellers are truly psychic; that we have countless lives; that Mark Antony has told him true tales of the future via a Ouija board: that without a medium, spirit voices came to him through a trumpet; that Spiritualism teaches immortality as a demonstrable fact but that the soul does not at death achieve infinite wisdom; that some of the modern cult leaders practice black magic; and he believes that in all his investigations he never "was swayed from the path of common sense."

Mr. Lieb's experiences and conclusions are not only interesting but thought-provoking. It is too bad, however, that he had to fan at the curved ball that has fooled so many others who peeked into the occult—confusing legerdemain and power—for it leads one to question his judgment at other times. Friends told him of the East Indian fakir who "will drop a seed into the ground, water it, throw his cloak over it, and the spectator will see the plant come through the ground, leaf, flower and even fruit." This is not the result, as you suggest, Mr. Lieb, of "astral fluid" but is merely a feat of conjuring. If it is any solace to you, sir, Madame Blavatsky fanned on that one too.

John Mulholland is the author of "Be-ware Familiar Spirits."



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