

# The Lore of Hawaii

HAWAIIAN MYTHOLOGY. By Martha Warren Beckwith. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1940. 575 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by PADRAIC COLUM

MARTHA WARREN BECKWITH is not only an investigator in the field of Hawaiian mythology: she is a historian of Hawaiian culture, and her interests are in romance and poetry as well as mythology. More than any other scholar I know of she is fascinated by the soul of the remarkable Kanaka-Maori people; she is thrilled by every expression of that soul whether it is its addiction to sorceries or its love of flowers and fragrances. She knows the landscape of Hawaii and its language, and she has friends amongst the survivors of the native learned classes. She writes clearly and freshly, and always with a sense of the imaginative elements in this lore. And as a scholar she knows the work of other scholars in the history and anthropology of the Polynesian people. There is no better guide than Martha Warren Beckwith in this domain. Here one should say that Hawaiian lore is part of the lore of the Polynesian race and it can only be understood in reference to the whole.

The difference between Hawaiian and the mythologies we are more or less familiar with—Greek, Norse, Egyptian, Babylonian—is the difference between a forest and a public park. In the familiar mythologies the underbrush has been cleared, the area has been formalized, noble growths have been left standing, and the tangled growths that let us know how wild and dark some of it was only can be glimpsed here and there. In Hawaiian mythology the wildness and fecundity of the forest is still around us: there are rare and beautiful growths, but a savage nature shows itself queerly and darkly. What impresses one is the endlessness of the growth. This is a mythology that controlled every personal life, that left a mark on every place, that gave a sanction to every undertaking, that reflected the history of a widely scattered race. However, one only speaks relatively when one says that Hawaiian mythology is unordered. One of the interesting things that Martha Warren Beckwith shows is that priests and chiefs, immigrants with their own family gods, influenced and ordered it. But it could never be brought to the clearness and order that are in the mythologies we are familiar with. For the Hawaiians—and this is true of all the Polynesians—are the most animistically-minded of peoples: for them there is a spirit in every tree and rock; they are poets, too, and they think in a language that cannot be abstract and that must be always metaphorical and imagistic.

There are gods or akua, there are

demi-gods or kupua; there are ancestral guardians or aumakua: these last are venerated in bodies of plants and in physical nature, or, after strange births, they appear as human beings and do extraordinary feats. The aumakua in their human form give rise to most of the Hawaiian stories. All the mythical conceptions are dominated by the idea of ancestry, ancestry from a divine parent stock, and grades of rank as revealed in family genealogy.

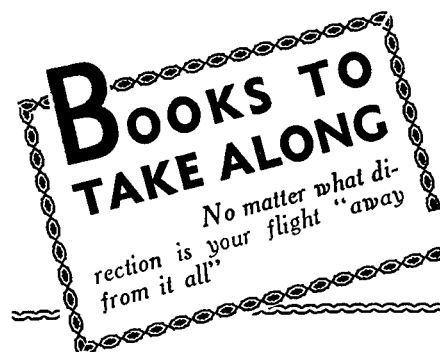
This is a mythology that was flourishing a little over a hundred years ago, and that from the time of its displacement by Christianity has been recorded and studied by native scholars and Hawaiian born Americans and Europeans; it still has its devotees. Miss Beckwith speaks of "traditional belief to-day in its compromise between the official religion accepted from foreign teachers and the family gods inherited through the irrevocable tie of blood and still to be held sacred and venerated by their descendants." This scholar speaks of a childhood spent at the foot of the House of the Sun in the windy island of Maui. "We were aware," she says "of a life just out of reach of us late comers but lived intensely by the kindly, generous race who had chanced so many centuries ago upon its shores." It is this sense of a life intensely lived and now just out of reach that gives a poetry to this book on what is perhaps the most interesting of mythologies.

Padraic Colum is the author of "Old Pastures," "Cross Roads in Ireland," and "Children of Odin," "Orpheus: Myth of the World."

## LITERARY QUIZ ANSWERS

(Questions on page 12)

1. Rustico, in *The Decameron*, by Boccaccio.
2. Ambrosio, in *The Monk*, by Matthew Gregory (Monk) Lewis.
3. Mr. Hooper, in *The Minister's Black Veil*, from *Twice Told Tales*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne.
4. Gavin Disheart, in *The Little Minister*, by James Barrie.
5. Mr. Heard, in *South Wind*, by Norman Douglas.
6. Boko Bickerton, in *The Bishop's Move*, from *Meet Mr. Mulliner*, by P. G. Wodehouse.
7. Rufe Pryor, in *Hell Bent for Heaven*, by Hatcher Hughes.
8. *Tartuffe*, by Moliere.
9. Rev. Mr. Sprague, in *Tom Sawyer*, by Mark Twain.
10. Mr. Collins, in *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen.



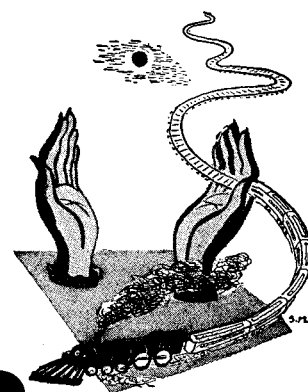
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# THE NEW BOOKS

## Belles Lettres

**THE LIVES AND TIMES OF ARCHY AND MEHITABEL.** By Don Marquis. Doubleday, Doran. 940. 269 pp. \$2.50.

Here is the omnibus volume of the famous cockroach and alley cat. They started on their gay and nefarious careers back in the early 1920s, and twenty years have not staled their infinite variety. George Herriman is their fit illustrator as always. All his drawings are here. One of the late Don Marquis's happiest efforts, this strange history of the cockroach who wrote his autobiography by jumping up and down upon typewriter keys, and of the romantically promiscuous feline who was "toujours gai," should take future generations captive as it has taken ours. The Free Verse Cockroach—do you remember—wrote as they trudged the desert back from Hollywood whence Mehitabel had been forcibly ejected from every studio—

after all she remarked dittens  
are but passing episodes in the life  
of a great artist i may have been  
given the bums rush from six auto  
camps  
in three days but hells bells  
i am still a lady

which is enough in itself to start us  
all reaching for the book and saying,  
"Yes, but listen; *this* was the choicest  
—!" Which really amounts to im-  
mortality! W. R. B.

## Fiction

**NO SILVER BELLS.** By Fhyllis Hambledon. Dutton. 1940. 314 pp. \$2.50.

Frankly sentimental is Miss Ham-

bledon's story, so frankly that we are quite disarmed. It is an honest tale of the heart and its education, and when we note that its heroine is a governess, and that its form is almost wholly epistolary—one long letter, in fact, to a lover—we see at once its deep obeisance to the epistolary romances of Richardson. It is queer to read a tale like this today, and to see that the same modest charm and the same sense of chaste gentility may still be brought to life out of the eighteenth century formula. Miss Hambledon has made her little Scotch governess, who turns at last into a sadly wise and eloquently literate lady of the heath, a sincere and credible person. If we will forbear to apply any modern measure to either her self or her tale, we shall find both to be highly appealing.

N. L. R.

**CELIBATE AT TWILIGHT.** By John Mosher. Random House. 1940. 296 pp. \$2.

Readers of the *New Yorker* will need no tempting review to induct them to this collection of brilliant "shorts" written by one of its staff. To those readers who prefer the *S.E.P.* school it may well be a pain in the neck. For as caviare to the New England boiled dinner, so are these subtly pungent little tales to the usual run of magazine fiction. There are dozens of them and six are enhanced by the sophisticated drawings of the delightful Mary Petty. Many have already been printed in the *New Yorker*, and a goodly proportion concern the muted existence of the inimitable Mr. Opal who first appeared in its pages sev-

eral years ago, and with the completely inconsequential talk and thoughts of the hostesses, guests, seashore vacationists whom he meets at parties, dinners, and the like while prospecting for diversion. The first taste like that of a good wine, may seem gentle and mild, but it is in the aftertaste that we recognize the richness of the flavor, and sense the wallop of irony that lies behind the seeming quiet of the author's humor. Some of the sketches are more devastating than others, but their quality is surprisingly uniform. Choose any at random, and if you like it at all, you will want to read them all. But not at one sitting, for in this, too, they are like caviare and good wine, and must not be gulped.

That Sally Benson and John Mosher are two personalities residing in one envelope I should have suspected long since. The discovery although late, adds considerably to my pleasure and I shall cherish it.

M. S. U.

**THE SALVATION OF PISCO GABAR, AND OTHER STORIES.** By Geoffrey Household. Little, Brown. 1940. 322 pp. \$2.50.

Although the title story of this collection is quite the best, the reader will find an extraordinary variety in Mr. Household's short stories, and very few among them that do not reward his attention with a natural charm that is all the author's own. His best stories grow easily out of the place and people, with unforced situations and a range of subject that is surprising. There is a murder mystery, set in the eastern Carpathians, with a theme of horror running through it that, for the civilized European, raises horror to a new high; there is the simple study of an exiled Cockney in New York, who finds exaltation, and a bizarre release from his bonds—at the Zoo; a theological morality with the convincing atmosphere of a medieval tale; and, next in high spirits and originality after "Pisco Gabar," the hilarious travelogue of a dare devil Cornishman and a South American Vice President, under the corny eye of Doña Clara, the statesman's wife. One returns to "The Salvation of Pisco Gabar," not because these and such short pieces as "Water of Iturrigori" or "Technique" lack any of the craft of perfectly told tales, but because the first story is a little masterpiece of the picaresque. Gabar embodies that deathless type of obstinate, hard-skinned, irreverent trader-adventurer often met with in English fiction but rarely with such understanding and success as here, and his viz-a-viz, the old priest Don José-Maria, is an equally immortal blend of the shrewd primitive and the follower of St. Francis—who boasted that God had made him ignorant because so many of the people were that way. When these two meet in stalemate, something has to give way, and rich humor supplies the chorus.

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of the last half-century." —HUGH WALPOLE

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