

Americans to read, since the facts it presents—unfavorable though they are to most of us—are essential to a full, critical knowledge of ourselves. All of us are verbally committed to a belief in democracy, freedom, fair play, and similar civic ideals; but these, as the authors show, are not the ideals we live by.

Side by side with the official doctrines about men's relationships to their fellows are the "folk beliefs" that influence human behavior far more profoundly than do any political or religious dogmas. These folk beliefs and attitudes become set at a very early age within family and play groups, where they are acquired by imitation and unconscious absorption long before the other institu-

tions get to work on the child's mind. Adult associations and cliques preserve them. The folk beliefs and the behavior pattern associated with them are difficult to change.

In the North, it would seem, as well as in the South, we Americans are motivated by folk beliefs regarding the Negro. Our gravest problem is to find out how we can penetrate to these deeper layers of our American selves and reconstruct our thinking. "Black Metropolis" itself gives no answer to this most baffling of all our problems; but in its sharp and lucid account of what we do to our colored fellow Americans, it supplies material that may help us toward an answer.

Under the Northern Lights

ROCK CRYSTAL. By Adalbert Stifter. Translated by Elizabeth Mayer and Marianne Moore. With illustrations by Joseph Scharl. New York: Pantheon Books. 1945. 96 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PAUL ROSENFELD

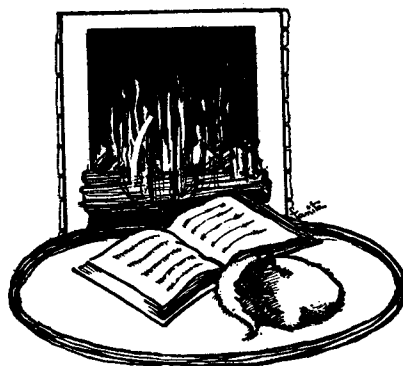
NOTHING in English or American literature quite resembles "Rock Crystal," the beautiful story by Adalbert Stifter which appears most attractively in this fine translation by Elizabeth Mayer and Marianne Moore. It is a realistic tale of two children who, crossing the mountains on Christmas Eve with gifts for their parents, stray onto a glacier and at nightfall take refuge in a stone hut. Knowing that if they fall asleep in the intense cold they will perish, they fight sleep with some essence of coffee which happens to be one of the presents. But the supply is small. Suddenly, northern lights appear and dance above the mountains. Fascinated, the youngsters involuntarily remain awake.

This realistic story is a tiny myth, a symbol of the relations between the cosmos and the human race. When man makes an effort to survive, something in the universe lends him a hand. The meaning is expressed in the words of the rescued child who, remembering the lights, tells her mother: "Last night I saw the Christ!" Slow in tempo at first, the narrative gradually and steadily gains tension. The language has a fine rhythmicality and sonority in which some critics have thought to hear the resonance of church bells. The author's feeling is sufficiently universal to engage juvenile, semi-educated, and highly-educated minds alike.

Stifter in fact is one of the four German writers other than Goethe and the Eckermann of "Conversations with Goethe" whose prose, in the eyes

of the mature Nietzsche of "The Wanderer and His Shadow," deserves frequent readings. The other three are the eighteenth-century aphorist Lichtenberg, the eighteenth-century autobiographer Jung-Stilling, and the nineteenth-century Swiss story-teller Gottfried Keller. "Indian Summer," a novel of Stifter's, together with Montaigne's essays, actually composed Nietzsche's bedside reading.

Stifter was a native of the region of Renaissance-Baroque culture which also nurtured Schubert and Rilke, Grillparzer and Hofmannsthal. The cir-



cumstance is impressive, insomuch as the sad earnestness, warmth, and lyricism characteristic of their work also characterize his own. He was born in 1805 in German-speaking Bohemia. At the age of twenty-one he went to Vienna to study natural science. The story goes that in Vienna Stifter was employed as tutor in the household of Chancellor Metternich and fell in love with one of the young princesses. He had to renounce this project and in 1837 married a good little Viennese milliner.

Up to the moment of his marriage Stifter had believed that his talent was for landscape painting. Abandoning futile efforts with color, he now turned to fiction. Stories by him ap-

peared in the Viennese newspapers from 1840 onward. He had merely exchanged one picture-making medium for another. The Bohemian forest constitutes one of the major protagonists in his novelette "The Timber Woods," the Hungarian steppe in "Bridget." These descriptions are exquisite in their representations of effects of light and shade. Readers of "Rock Crystal" will meet an instance of this happy pictorialization in the evocations of the ice-world into which the story's two small personages wander.

Following the March revolution of 1848, Stifter accepted an appointment as supervisor of schools in Upper Austria. His marriage having proved childless, he and his wife adopted a daughter. Like her adoptive father, the girl must have been somewhat of a melancholiac: disappointed in youth in a love affair, she threw herself into the Danube. Stifter's own final year was harrowed by sufferings from an incurable illness, and in 1868 he took his life.

The body of work which he had begun under the influence of James Fenimore Cooper and the lushly romantic Jean Paul, and continued under that of the discreetly simple, realistic Goethe of "The Elective Affinities," is distinguished and mellow. That doubtless is what attracted Nietzsche to it. Stifter displays a sort of "flight from the dramatic." The continual retardation has been felt seriously to mar his last book, the historical novel "Witiko." One sarcastic critic promised the Polish crown to anyone contriving to read it through. Stifter's sense of psychology, particularly that of elderly men and of boys ("The Bachelor" and "Indian Summer") is accurate. He is one of those writers who have seen the glamor of the commonplace and the intimate.

Stifter at first had believed that nature and man are evolved by a single law and that man flourished and fell like the forest trees. Then, as we might gather from "Rock Crystal," he came to believe that forces in the universe specially support man. As for man himself, thought Stifter, he maintains himself for his part by exercising "the soft law." The words are from the famous preface to Stifter's story-collection "Fancy Stones." This practice is "righteousness, simplicity, self-discipline, reasonableness, efficiency in one's own sphere, admiration of the beautiful linked with serene and relaxed effort. This law prevails where people live side by side with people—in the industry through which one creates for one's own group, for distant parts, for humanity." He knew that "the soft law" cannot be arbitrarily compelled. Distinctly he called it "the freely self-imposed practice of humanity."

The "Signs" of Aldous Huxley

THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY. By Aldous Huxley. New York: Harper & Bros. 1945. 301 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by SIDNEY HOOK

EVEN those who cannot find in Mr. Huxley's otherworldly mysticism either a satisfactory system of thought or an adequate way of life will enjoy his collection of maxims, parables, and key quotations from the writings of the great mystical figures of the past. As is usually the case with penetrating insights, they can be interpreted on various levels, and win an assent for reasons that may not be central—perhaps even foreign—to the minds of those who uttered them. Thus a naturalist who does not believe that the soul survives the body may still find an important truth suggested in the observation of St. John of the Cross that "The soul lives by that which it loves rather than in the body which it animates." It tells him that the ideal objects of allegiance rather than its causes define the quality of human personality. Mr. Huxley, however, has not contented himself with weaving garlands of quotations around the great themes of mystical doctrine. He has used them as decorative illustrations in his own running commentary on the doctrine. To the reflective reader he thereby undoes all the good which from his own point of view might have been accomplished by the quotations alone. For he makes the mistake of using defective arguments in behalf of a position whose truth ultimately depends upon evidence that has nothing to do with argument.

The perennial philosophy, as Mr. Huxley preaches it, is the belief that the only true existence is the one divine Reality that pervades the world, that all difference, finitude, pain, and evil are illusory, that the mind is blessed with a divinely-sent power of grasping divine Reality, and that the final end of man is, by the mortification of self and will, knowledge-through-union with the ineffable Ground of all being. In one sense, this philosophy is impervious to any kind of rational criticism, for it maintains that analytic or discursive thinking by its very nature is fatal to the intuitions of "unitive" knowledge of the one. At most, such thinking is like a crutch or ladder which can be used up to a point in helping crippled spirits free themselves from the imaginary weight of non-existent matter and can then be thrown away. But just as soon as the mystic abandons the unassailable ground of his own feeling of certitude and joy in an effort to convince others of the truth of the beatific vision, or even to induce

them to begin the "upward" climb with a reasoned hope that they will meet the truth face to face, he must accept the responsibilities of analysis. The best mystics, it seems to me, have not been those who have abandoned reason, but those who have carried it as far as it can go, like Plotinus, Aquinas, and Hegel.

Mr. Huxley, unfortunately, does not take his intellectual responsibilities seriously enough. Even if his position were in fact true, he would owe to those whom he is trying to convince an attempt to answer difficulties that are as perennial as the perennial philosophy itself. A few may be listed to indicate how fundamental they are. The first is the assumption that there is or must be one all-encompassing whole without which no part of experience is truly intelligible. The contrary assumption that the world is pluralistic in character is perfectly consistent with itself and the facts of experience. Second, even if we beg the question of monism, it has never been made clear why the *type* of unity asserted to exist must be different from that observed in the modes of practical or scientific experience. Third, there is a whole cluster of gratuitous assumptions about the existence of a special organ of apprehension by which the mystic unity is grasped, the existence of a substantial soul, and the justification of speaking of union with the One, in which no distinctions are recognized, as a form of knowledge. On the purely psychological level, the mystical love of the One, from which judgment of any kind is absent, cannot be distinguished from the mystical worship of Mammon, or Mars, or Priapus. Fourth, no mystic has ever made remotely credible why there is difference and otherness in the world, why the Plotinian soul must descend into the world, why the world was created, and how the experience of pain becomes any less painful by calling it an illusion.

Mr. Huxley nowhere meets these and similar difficulties directly. Instead he tries to short cut them by a kind of scientific argument that would startle the shade of Thomas Huxley. He tells us that just as we can discover the nature of matter only by making certain physical experiments, so we can discover the divine element in mind by making certain psychological and moral experiments. But what he has actually done is to select in advance those who have testified to the presence of the divine and used this testimony as a criterion of whether the experiments have been fairly conducted. He has ignored the experience of vast numbers who have followed the tech-



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Aldous Huxley: "Every violence is a sacrilegious rebellion against the divine order."

niques of living and thinking—and even eating and breathing—recommended by the mystics, and who have been vouchsafed no sign of the One. His real criterion is one of faith, not evidence—faith held at the outset of the "experiment" and at the conclusion.

Theoretical difficulties aside, the strongest practical objection to Mr. Huxley's perennial philosophy is that by its doctrine of the universal immanence of the One and by its equation between the assertion of the individual will and metaphysical evil, it cuts the nerve of morality. This is all the more important because it was his hunger for a better life that originally drove him on a quest that turned out to be a pilgrimage to the One. Mr. Huxley steps very gingerly around the implications of his position at this point but from it there flows his acceptance of absolute pacifism. "Every violence is, over and above everything else, a sacrilegious rebellion against the divine order"—including the violence that would protect the guiltless. There are no just wars, and no just self-defence.

If the case against violence rested on metaphysics alone, it would be very weak, indeed. There are metaphysical systems from Heraclitus down which justify violence, and their claims as metaphysics are every whit as strong as those of the perennial philosophy. Logically, on the basis of the perennial philosophy, it is hard to see why the One is any less manifest in acts of violence than in acts of non-violence. It is on *empirical* grounds that the strongest case against violence can be made. But these grounds do not justify