

Hocus-Pocus Throughout History

THE MIRROR OF MAGIC: A History of the Magical Ideas and Practices of the Western World. By Kurt Seligmann. New York: Pantheon Books. 1948. 504 pp. \$8.50.

Reviewed by PADRAIC COLUM

ALTHOUGH this book is encyclopedic it has not the dryness of a work of reference; it deals with a fascinating subject in an entertaining way. The author is an artist who writes out of a life-long interest in magic; for him magic, or to be more general, the picture of the world that, so to speak, rationalizes magic, is one of the great creations of the human imagination—"a living tradition which has permeated religion, politics, philosophy, and, above all, the arts." He aims at confining his subject to Europe and to the Christian period, but he has had to make excursions among the Arabs, the Chinese, the Persians, the Jews of the post-Christian period, and has had to open with a fairly extensive account of the magic of Mesopotamia, Persia, Palestine, Egypt, and proceed through Greece, the Roman Empire, and the sect that was the carrier for so many magical ideas and practices, Gnosticism.

His account of magical ideas and practices in Europe opens with alchemy. The art came into the West in the second century A.D. But it was with the coming into Europe of the Hermetic books, the revelations ascribed to "thrice great Hermes," that the alchemists received that body of esoteric doctrine that gave them devotees through generations, and these came some centuries later.

How did the metaphysical speculations of the alchemists, the cabalists, the Rosicrucians fit with the apparently anarchic practices of the witches of the Middle Ages? Kurt Seligmann speaks of the magic of the Rosicrucians and the cabalists as symbolizing "man's power over the material world, and the belief that through thought and action he could ascend into the realms of brotherhood." The attempt to gain power over the material world through thought and action was in witchcraft, too.

Witchcraft was not obtrusive in the early ages of Christian Europe. To be sure, there were workers in evil magic, but they were dealt with in a manner that later seemed to be of extraordinary leniency. "Together with the devil the witch made her entrance into the Middle Ages," Kurt Seligmann writes, dating the entry in the eleventh century. Then until the eighteenth, when belief was still common that witches

could fly with the speed of wind, Europe was under increasing terror of witchcraft, a terror that was added to by wholesale persecutions. If magic may be regarded as a system that existed side by side with Christianity, it had as many martyrs as the early Church, probably many, many more. One of the few good things that could be said for Louis XIV was that he stopped trials for witchcraft, and when his courts had to deal with the sacrifice of infants in the Black Mass he put the practitioners on trial not as witches but as criminals.

Originally what afterwards came to be witches' sabbath was a revival of the old pagan cults, the unextirpated religion of the villages and the heaths. But "the sabbath became sinister when the old pagan rites were no longer considered the revival of a decayed past but evil activities born of heresy and witchcraft." The country people had their memories of the divinities that we know as Pan, Diana, Janus. As long as Christianity meant an order in which villagers and farm people could feel themselves a part, their recourse to these was intermittent. But when church and state pressed too heavily upon them they were drawn back to the traditional divinities. Then came the Black Death which made it seem that the divinity of the church and state was powerless. It was then that the sabbath became "the evil activities born of heresy and witchcraft." The terror created by repressions, a terror that went on for generations in countries that had become Protestant as well as in countries that remained Catholic, made people the more eager to join with the gods of the underworld, now frankly devils. In the meantime, for the learned there were beliefs derived from neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and the Jewish scholars of the Cabbala.

The rise of interest in the Cabbala is another example of the persistence of belief in the world picture of magic. The Hebrew prophets had done more than any other spiritual and intellectual leaders to wean people away from it, and had created a spiritual and ethical world separated from the magical worlds of Egypt and Babylon. And yet Jewish scholars in the post-Christian period formed out of Gnosticism a magical picture that for long influenced the higher minds of Europe.

The erudition of "The Mirror of Magic" is enormous—even the assembling of two hundred and fifty pictures all relevant to the text is in itself a work of learning. Kurt Seligmann's approach to his subject is es-



—CBS.

My Current Reading

Helen Hayes, actress, first appeared on the stage at the age of six, and has taken a great many leading roles since. She is the wife of Charles MacArthur, the playwright. Miss Hayes tells us that she was led to read Seutonius's "Lives of the Caesars" because of her enthusiasm for Thornton Wilder's "The Ides of March."

THE GATHERING STORM, by Winston S. Churchill (Houghton Mifflin)

27 WAGONS FULL OF COTTON, And Other One-Act Plays, by Tennessee Williams (New Directions)

EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE, by Marcia Davenport (Scribner's)

THE LOVED ONE, by Evelyn Waugh (Little, Brown)

GHOSTS IN IRISH HOUSES, by James Reynolds (Creative Age)

SHORT STORIES OF JOSEPH CONRAD CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY, by Alan Paton (Scribner's)

THE IDES OF MARCH, by Thornton Wilder (Harper)

SEUTONIUS'S LIVES OF THE CAESARS THE MEANING OF TREASON, by Rebecca West (Viking)

thetic. He recognizes that magical wisdom was "not a wild, anarchic, purely subjective play of the imagination, but rather a systematic world view attempting to synthesize all knowledge, and re-establishing itself in every era." On its higher levels this wisdom led to a reinforcement of man's faith in himself and to investigation of a kind. What the alchemists dreamt of has now come true: metals have been transmuted and even new elements have been brought into existence. Poets like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Yeats brought exciting directions into poetry through their study of magic. Perhaps in this age of arbitrary forces we need a mirror of magic, a mirror such as portrait painters use to show their sitter upside down and so correct something in appearance and proportion.

Comprehensive Malady

SOCIETY AS THE PATIENT. By Lawrence K. Frank. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1948. 395 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by ASHER BRYNES

FOR MORE than twenty-five years Dr. Frank has been an indefatigable contributor to learned journals and a recurrent appearer at meetings of learned societies. On these occasions he has stressed a general point of view. His addresses and writings have been pleas for the reintegration of the social order through a pooling of the insights and methods of the various expert workers in art and literature and the inexact sciences. He has broadened the mental horizons of many specialists: this book, for instance, is introduced by an educator, praised by an anthropologist, and welcomed by a philosopher. Here thirty of his theses or papers are assembled in a single publication, and the plain reader is invited to the feast.

The plain reader will find it hard going. The portions are too small, and too numerous; and every time another

article is served a new cloth is laid on the table. Such repetitions were barely noticeable, of course, when these essays were printed at intervals in almost as many separate magazines. In the present case they are a distraction. The simplicity of Dr. Frank's message is obscured, which is a pity because that virtue is precisely the thing which a lay reader is best equipped to appreciate.

Dr. Frank views all psychological and social ailments, that is to say every kind of misbehavior, including stomach ulcers, as human reactions to cultural disintegration. He emphatically denies that they are due to individual misdeeds. Nobody is guilty of anything; guilt is an outmoded conception. When a man is at odds with himself or at loggerheads with society either he or the society or both are maladjusted; and mostly it is the society. An entire social order can succumb to chaos and confusion; indeed our own is in such a state. Wars are merely the most obvious symptom of this comprehensive malady.

In our attitudes toward political



life we cherish a mistaken belief in the soundness and efficiency of representative government. In our economic affairs we nurse a preference for free enterprise, the money and credit economy, the price system "with its supposed free play of economic forces and the law of supply and demand." In our family lives we likewise ascribe our good fortune or, conversely, blame our troubles on acts of individual wickedness or guilt in ourselves or others. Finally in the law courts, where the worst of such symptomatic evils are treated, we incriminate the prisoner at the bar instead of censuring the inadequacy of our judicial and penal processes.

In every aspect of our social life we find the same pattern of thought about our society: that our social ills come from individual misconduct (and) these conceptions have dominated both lay and professional thinking for . . . three hundred years.

The last statement is open to serious objection on historical grounds; the Christian code of personal morality, responsibility, and redemption has dominated our thinking for two thousand years. But let us follow the argument. Dr. Frank says that if we continue to view the *individual* and *society* separately, as thinkers have been prone to do in the past, we will never be able to put an end to the conflict between both. We will have to agree with our forefathers that the "dilemma of the individual versus society" is in fact unresolvable. But we do not have to think so; the newer social sciences (psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology) teach otherwise. Between those polar terms they disclose an intermediate factor.

Dr. Frank defines *culture* as the pattern of beliefs, assumptions, and practices whereby the behavior of the individual toward the group, or his behavior toward other individuals, is so directed as to make the best bargain

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

HOW IS YOUR RHETORIC?

Helen Pettigrew, of Charleston, Ark., submits thirty assorted titles, in each of which the name of a different form of writing has been omitted. If you get them all right you are entitled to a madrigal in your honor, but less than twenty-five earns you a threnody. Answers are on page 35.

1. George Ade: "..... in Slang"
2. Philip Barry: "The Philadelphia"
3. James Boswell: "..... of Dr. Johnson"
4. Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "..... from the Portuguese"
5. William Jennings Bryan: "..... at the Democratic Convention"
6. Robert Burns: "..... to the Unco Guid"
7. Coleridge: "..... before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni"
8. William Cowper: "..... on a Hare"
9. Thomas De Quincy: "..... of an English Opium-Eater"
10. Charles Dickens: "A Child's of England"
11. Ernest Dowson: "..... of His Lady's Treasures"
12. Edward Fitzgerald: "The of Omar Khayyam"
13. John Galsworthy: "The Forsyte"
14. Thomas Gray: "..... Written in a Country Churchyard"
15. Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Tanglewood"
16. Washington Irving: "The of Sleepy Hollow"
17. John Keats: "..... on a Grecian Urn"
18. Rudyard Kipling: "Departmental"
19. Charles Lamb: "A Upon Roast Pig"
20. Sidney Lanier: "..... of the Chattahoochee"
21. Abraham Lincoln: "..... to Mrs. Bixby"
22. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "A of Life"
23. John Milton: "Comus: A"
24. Samuel Pepys: "....."
25. Alexander Pope: "An on Man"
26. Sir Walter Scott: "The of the Last Minstrel"
27. George Bernard Shaw: "Fanny's First"
28. Edward Rowland Sill: "The Fool's"
29. William Makepeace Thackeray: "The of Bouillabaise"
30. Sen. George Graham Vest: "..... on the Dog"