

Science and Studies.

Increasingly today, social scientists have been invading the more delicate areas of the mind's operation and of the operations of minds in society. We have turned in on ourselves, introspectively, like the philosophers of Greece, to explore the meaning of self and of spirit in relation to the world around us. But scientists themselves are traditionally wary of the borderline disciplines. Few can question the value of the scientific approach towards rumor developed by two Harvard scientists in "The Psychology of Rumor." Rumor was proved during World War II to be a deadly weapon in morale warfare. Many more will question the validity of psychical research as discussed by Dr. Anspacher in his "Challenge of the Unknown." As the borders of science expand in the direction of mind, the flexibility and boldness of approach typical of the eminent British scientists may be needed. For an example, read "Evolution and Ethics," reviewed below.

"Secret Wild Oat"

CHALLENGE OF THE UNKNOWN.
By Louis K. Anspacher. New York: Current Books, Inc. 1947. 327 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by FRANCIS W. LEARY

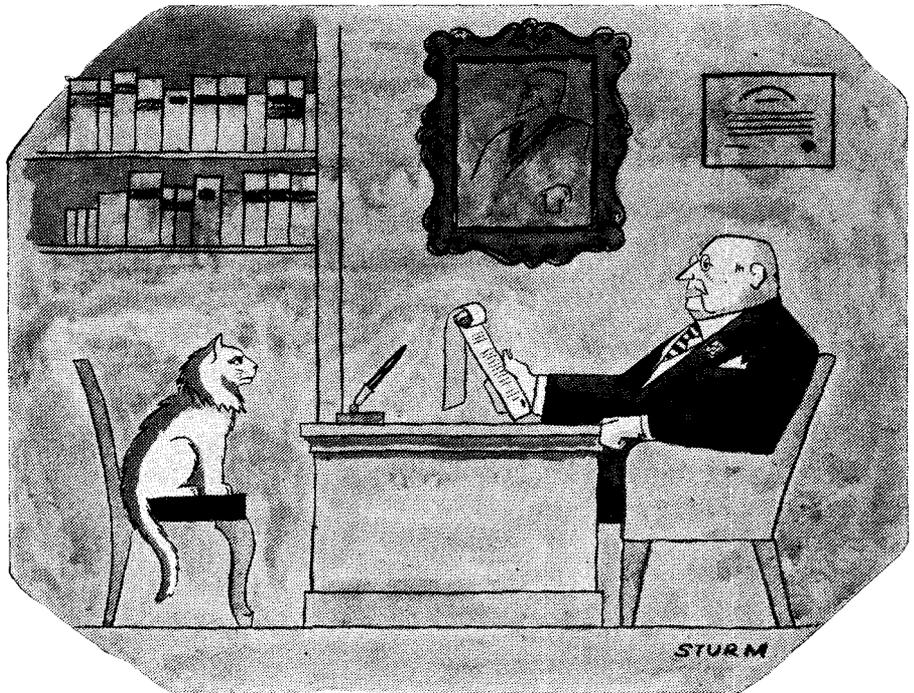
PSYCHICAL research has lost much of the sympathetic climate it once possessed in Victorian England. To many otherwise well-informed persons it is little more than a high-sounding name for superstition and old wives' tales. Whether the gaslight era provided more favorable illumination for the activities of the Unseen may be conjectural, but there is no doubt that men like Myers, Lodge, Gurney, and Crookes furnished a powerful intellectual leadership which commanded the respect if not the complete accord of thoughtful opinion of that time.

It is the hope of Dr. Anspacher to awaken interest in the whole subject and to stimulate others in the investigation of what he terms his "secret wild oat." His latest work is an anthology of comment in which psychical research is considered in relation to art, philosophy, and religion as well as to the physical sciences; quotations are liberally borrowed from great names in all these pursuits and the argument from authority constantly repeated. However, the most suggestive aspect is found in the few recorded cases mentioned, including such elaborate departures from familiar ground as the experiment with the talking horses of Elberfelde. It is clear, as the author points out, that Mohammed and Zarif—the prodigious stallions—demonstrate the immense possibilities in the entire sub-human kingdom of thought and sensation, given an investigator with sufficient vision to reject traditional approaches. And this is no doubt true for all phases of psychical research.

I have sometimes wondered [Bergson remarked] what would have

happened if modern science, instead of setting out from mathematics and bringing all its forces to converge on the study of matter and physics, had begun by a consideration of mind and soul: if Kepler, Galileo, and Newton had been psychologists instead of mathematicians and astronomers. . . .

While Dr. Anspacher's book has broad speculative implications, most readers are likely to feel that it has no more than rippled the surface in any direction. Much of the present material was originally presented in the form of lectures and one can easily imagine how effective Dr. Anspacher could make the last moments of Socrates or the psychic intimations of the poet Wordsworth, but one may inquire if this really advances an understanding of what psychical research has been able to accomplish since the task was first seriously undertaken in the eighties. It would have been per-



"You will be disappointed, I fear, to learn that your late mistress, Mrs. Courtney Somers, left her entire fortune to her relatives."

haps more relevant, if not so rhetorically impressive, to have included a survey of the work of the London and New York societies for psychical investigation and the courageous efforts of an all-too-few band of researchers to maintain the faith and scientific rigor of the founders. However, one must grant that the author has succeeded in making the subject both popular and significant, which more scientific evaluations have often failed to accomplish. His book expounds the ageless questions at the core of life and the universe, but leaves up to the reader practical methods of inquiry.

$R = I \times A$

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RUMOR. By Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1947. 247 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD L. BERNAYS

IF YOU want to know how rumors start, travel, and can be recognized, this book will give you the answers. In it Prof. Gordon W. Allport, of the Department of Social Relations of Harvard University, and Prof. Leo Postman, of the University of Indiana, put rumor under the microscope of the social sciences—sociology, social psychology, and psychology—and make an important contribution to our existing knowledge of rumor in peace and wartime.

The professors recognize that wherever there is social strain, there is rumor too. By giving for the first time a coherent and unified presentation of rumors, they believe they may

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"This is a disquieting, painful, but absorbing novel about personal freedom. M. Sartre has transmuted his philosophical ideas into compelling human situations and powerfully illustrated the truths that to seek freedom by divesting oneself of responsibilities is to find no freedom and that to refuse to arrive at a decision is the most unsatisfactory of all decisions."—THORNTON WILDER

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On sale at all bookshops and published in New York by

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be providing an aid to social therapeutics. They set forth methods of analyzing rumors and of dealing with them. The authors first describe rumors in wartime, rumor defenses and offenses. They establish a formula for rumors which they call the basic law of rumor: R equals i (importance) times a (ambiguity).

Rumors relieve, justify, and explain emotional tensions; individuals project themselves in rumors.

The authors discuss their experimental laboratory approach to rumors. Since they maintain that rumors are dependent on testimony and recall, on perceiving, remembering, and reporting, their experiments utilize principles established in these fields, and are based on memory and testimony. In them, they show cards representing scenes of tension to individuals who are asked to pass on their impressions from one to another in as many as six verbal reproductions of the scene. They find experimentally that perceptions go through various changes in the progress from individual to individual—leveling, sharpening, assimilating these impressions. Sometimes there are shifts of themes, inversions, and elaborations, “effort after meaning” (sic: rationalization), verbal misunderstandings, time and place errors.

Never is there completely truthful transmission of such tension material.

The authors see a universality of the three-part patterns of distortion in the carrying of all rumors—leveling, assimilation, sharpening. There are also, of course, exaggeration, elaboration, and condensation.

The relationship of rumor to legend is touched upon. But no definitive attempt is made to classify rumors, because of their wide variety. The relationship of rumor to riot is also commented upon, and the relationship of rumor to humor.

In an analysis of seven case studies, the authors attempt to apply the principles they have isolated and offer readers some additional rumors as case studies for their own analysis. The book contains a valuable bibliography and a complete index.

In only one field, in the opinion of this reviewer, have the authors minimized an important category of rumors. That is the field of rumor in commerce and industry. The same principles that apply to wartime rumors are valid here, too. These obviously have not had serious study to date. Such rumors are widespread and powerful in effect. Rumors in this field reflect the same fears, hopes, and frustrations as they do in other fields. In our own experiences we have had to fight rumors against business

organizations and products that represented racial and religious fears, competitive interests between independents and chain stores, fears of airplane travel, charges, and weights. There is a mass of such data available and it is hoped that the authors will direct their effort towards this field in their next study, to aid in social therapeutics here too.

Edward L. Bernays, public relations counsel, was chairman of the Treasury Department's national publicity advisory committee for the Third War Loan. He is author of “Take Your Place at the Peace Table.”

Man: A Problem

EVOLUTION AND ETHICS. By Sir Arthur Keith. With a preface by Ernest A. Hooton. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1947. 246 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by J. LAWRENCE ANGEL

SIR ARTHUR KEITH, now in his eighties, is one of the world's great surgical anatomists and physical anthropologists. In this sequence of essays he gives challenging answers to the problems of man's recent and future growth. He anatomizes the paradox of civilization's antipathy to the fierce forms of war which it has created. And at a deeper level he exposes, in family affection and distrust of strangers, the origins of ethical and “cosmical” codes of action. These have led to social isolation of tribal breeding groups as the means of man's recent evolution.

Without undue optimism the author writes, “The thesis I am seeking to prove is that fierce war must be attributed to an inborn fierce nature which has been developed in tribes long subjected to the rigors of competitive evolution.” Although “one of the chief effects of Christianity is to dissolve the crust of tribalism and to permit tribal peoples to fuse in a fellowship of mutual love,” “if we desire a world studded with free . . . nations . . . we shall regard the inter-



minglings of peoples . . . as prejudicial or evil.” Yet to the question “is it possible for two peoples living within the same frontiers . . . to work out harmoniously their separate evolutionary destinies?” Keith answers, “We in Britain and America believe it to be not only possible but also profitable.”

This attempt to combine nationalism with Christian idealism and universalism is unobtrusively but fully supported by authorities ranging from Aristotle via Bagehot, Gibbon, and Darwin to the three Huxleys, Hooton, and Laski. Hence the work cannot be dismissed as racism though it skirts this pitfall.

Social scientists will be amazed at the almost complete omission of childhood conditioning as a factor in national character and at the consequent confusion of recent social evolution with long-term species evolution. Part of this lack of separation of environmental from genetic processes seems to be semantic, springing from science's incomplete knowledge as well as from Keith's choice of metaphors. But I do not understand why the author quotes Julian Huxley on man's great biological variability and yet leaves out the mixture of previously isolated groups as a creative force in both biological and social evolution.

Obviously it was impossible in England during the war to write on man's future without bias. But perhaps the ultimate reason for disagreement is that the author's approach combines nineteenth-century rationalism with modern skepticism. This results in an original but pungent concentration of the inconsistencies in recent human evolution: the work is meant to provoke stimulating controversy. And it is a tribute to the author's ability that it does so without being offensive. Yet ultimately the book is important more as a symptom of everybody's concern over the future of mankind than as a major contribution to anthropology. The bitter paradoxes brought out in Sir Arthur's discussion of the contradictory interrelations of war and of Christian morality with the rise of civilization are, however, well worth emphasizing. And since Sir Arthur Keith's evidence proves clearly the unity of anthropological with economic and political factors in shaping world destiny neither nationalists nor internationalists can afford to overlook this book.

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