

## BOOK NOTES

*A History of Magic and Experimental Science.* Vols. III and IV. Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries. By Lynn Thorndike. New York, Columbia University Press, 1934. Pp., respectively, xxvi + 827 and xviii + 767.

The first two volumes of this series, published in 1923 by the MacMillan Company, covered the period of the Roman Empire to the end of the thirteenth century. The present two volumes proceed through the two following centuries with an increasing amount of source material. As in the earlier two volumes the long historical association between magic and experimental science has been stressed, especially the development of our scientific experimental method from the experiments in magic.

The volumes consist in a resumé of the manuscripts and books of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors in the three chief divisions of the subject—astrology, alchemy, and magical procedure in medicine, as well as the reaction of popular opinion to these pursuits and the official attitudes of various popes, sovereigns, and churchmen. Astrology seems to have held a more dignified position than any other form of divination and was generally regarded with more respect than alchemy, which was treated as a mysterious and occult art, in its nature dark and wicked.

Under Pope John XXII a conference of alchemists and natural scientists was held to determine whether or not alchemy had any basis in nature, but since none of them could offer any positive proof of their contentions, a decretal against transmutation and counterfeiting was issued. But Pope John was not above believing in occult virtue as is seen in a letter concerning the gift of a knife of serpent's horn said to possess the power of detecting poison, and he is said to have paid a sum of money to his physician for "certain secret work," probably an elixir of life.

That astrology played an important part in surgery and medicine will surprise readers who are unfamiliar with this subject. Gentile de Foligno, one of the best-known fourteenth-century physicians and a prolific writer, in a *Consilium* on the Black Death of 1348, found the cause of the pestilence in "dispositions depending from the forms of the sky . . ." and the herbs which he prescribed derived their virtue straight from the stars. Two short tracts ascribed to him show entirely opposite attitudes toward the occult: the first on incubus deals with the subject as a diseased condition purely from a physiological and psychological point of view; the second tract on whether words, incantations, and suspension from the neck are able to cure disease shows how influential was magic in the medicine of that day.

There seemed to be no sharp distinction between the natural and the miraculous. Poisoning, as a matter of course, was classed with the casting of spells and curses, and many pages were devoted to various kinds of poisons and their detection. Black magic and charms were considered effective ways of disposing of an enemy.

Attacks against astrology and occult arts, however, were not lacking. Probably the most notable of these was by Nicolas Oresme in the late fourteenth century. In several treatises he systematically takes up his arguments seeking always a natural explanation for the wonders and offering hypotheses to explain them. He accepts demons and miracles as a matter of faith, but denounces ecclesiastical frauds devised to secure offerings from the credulous. His attitude to the deceptibility of the senses reminds one of that of the later empirical philosophers.

In the fifteenth century, however, John de Fundis defends astrology against Oresme, and he blames the sky for "so many earthly tribulations," but he blames the princes still more for they should be able to exert their will and resist the influence of the heavens.

One finds germs of later scientific thought in these centuries. Henry of Hesse besides writing against occult virtue predicts that new diseases may arise in future times from new combinations and suggests that new species of herbs and plants needed to cure these new diseases would also develop. He is not unfavorably to alchemy.

The tenacity of popular interest in the occult and in astrology suggests that perhaps the world is not so different today, when we see men excite great interest not because of their accomplishments in science or art, but because they are said to have had intercourse with spirits. It has been reported recently that there are 25,000 magicians in New York City today who collect \$25,000,000 annually from the gullible.

In the conclusion of this monumental piece of scholarship the author tells of his and his collaborator's attitude in going over the old books and manuscripts: "We have taken them as we found them, and we esteem them for what they are in their totality, their fourteenth and fifteenth century *complexio*—a chapter in the history of human thought. Read it and smile or read it and weep, as you please. We would not credit it with the least particle of modern science that does not belong to it, nor would we deprive it of any of that magic that constitutes in no small measure its peculiar charm. Perhaps it would be well to read it and think of what the future historian may say of the mentality and scholasticism of the present era and with what sympathy or antipathy he would be justified in regarding us."

*The Turkish Transformation.* By Henry Elisha Allen. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1935. Pp. xii + 251.

The purpose of the author in this book is to aid in the understanding of the significance of recent social and religious changes in Turkey.

Turkey, once the champion of Islam, is in the process of transforming herself on the pattern of a modern European state where religion, once the test of citizenship, is separated from the state and civil law. The outcome of the Turkish experiment is of especial importance to other Moslem states for, if Islam is able to survive the drastic changes which it has been forced to undergo, it has proved itself adaptable and still vital—two qualities which are very necessary in the rapidly changing conditions of the Near East where the impact of western ideas and inventions is making itself so forcefully felt by the many and quick changes in the lives of the people.

The rush to westernize in Turkey came after the World War under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk. In order to preserve herself, a unified population was necessary; above all else and implicit in all else patriotic loyalty was needed. To achieve this, drastic changes were essential especially in the religious, social, and educational institutions so that Turkey might achieve greater efficiency and economic strength and compete with other nations.

The present attitude of the government probably is neither one of hostility to religion nor over friendliness, but rather between the two and best described by the adjective "experimental."

Mr. Allen has given us many excerpts from recent Turkish books and periodicals making this book a valuable source of first-hand information about the Turkish Transformation.

*The Renewing Gospel.* By Walter Russell Bowie. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935. Pp. xii + 296.

A plea for a living and growing religion and for inspiring preaching. The author deploras the rationalizing interpretations of the life of Jesus which consider him a teacher of ethics or the "first social revolutionary," and insists upon the supernatural character of His life. "Religious authority," he insists "ought to be based not on fidelity" (once-for-all-ness) but it is the "fertility of Jesus which makes him timeless."

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The book has as a frontispiece a reproduction of the painting of Dr. Harris which hangs in the Commissioner's room of the U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.

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