

THE SUFIS by Idries Shah. *W. H. Allen, 45s.*

On the jacket of this unusual book we are told that the full name of its author is Nawabzada Sayed Idries Shah el-Hashimi, described as 'the grand Sheikh of the Sufis'. Sprung from a high-born family in the North of India, he was himself born at Simla. He now lives in London. He has, we are told, published several books on mystical and occult subjects. It would be interesting to know what these are.

The book is sponsored by none other than Mr Robert Graves, who, in his introduction, says: 'if anyone deserves the blame for its publication, it is myself'. He explains that it is 'not addressed to intellectuals or other orthodox thinkers' – but do not dismiss the book from your mind, for he adds: 'nor is it addressed to anyone who will fail to recognise it at once as addressed to himself'.

In other words, this book is something of a challenge. The reading of it is rendered irksome and, at times, exasperating, by a great deal of superfluous detail and a style which is not always sure of itself. The author finds Sufism or Sufi influences in the most unlikely places and people, including President de Gaulle and a pack of playing cards. No doubt through a laudable desire to 'bridge the gap' between Western and Eastern thought-worlds (p. xxiii of author's Preface), he brings in a vast amount of matter which has only a superficial or incidental relationship with his main theme. Many chapters could have been cut out with advantage. Ploughing through them now leaves the reader confused and asking himself when he is going to find the sustenance he had hoped for.

The author has evidently an intimate and familiar acquaintance, not only with the authors already known to us Westerners, at least from the outside, but also with the day-to-day methods of Sufi teachers and the climate of understanding and insight they have established. In fact, here is an Indian Sufi speaking of things that are his daily food. We must be grateful to Idries Shah for having thus taken us into his confidence. The publishers have called this 'the definitive work' on Sufism. I feel sure that the author himself would never have made such a claim, for he is constantly driving home to us that Sufism does not constitute a rigid body of fixed and unchanging doctrines, that it is essentially fluid, adapting its methods and teachings to the needs of the hour and the mentality of the men of each generation.

Among the most useful chapters are that entitled (somewhat disconcertingly) 'The Book of the Dervishes', which contains an excellent summary of the teaching of Sheikh Suhrawardi in his 'Awarif el Ma'arif' ('Gifts of Wisdom'), and the following one on 'The Dervish Orders'. Then there is a series of chapters giving a very useful account of the writings of Mulla Nasreddin, Sheikh Saadi of Shiraz, Farid uddin Attar, Mawlana Rumi, el Ghazali, Omar Khayyam and (less satisfying – can it be that he has been over-estimated?) the Andalusian Ibn el Arabi.

By this book Idries Shah has pushed aside a curtain and let us see Indian Sufism at work. At the same time he has revealed himself to us as a sound and engaging Master of The Way.

*Cyprian Rice, O.P.*

THE PERMISSIVE MORALITY by C. H. and Winifred M. Whiteley. *Methuen, 15s.*

The Whiteleys have set themselves an ambitious task: they survey the ways in which life has changed since 1900, and assess the effects on the quality of human experience and the moral attitudes commonly accepted in our society. Inevitably, in a book of 140 pages, the authors mix broad generalizations and personal inter-

pretations, some commonplace, some perceptive, some disputable. They find that while our material standard of living has risen, our moral lives have been attenuated. They attribute this, not primarily to modern philosophy or psychology, but to the erosion of responsibility by the mechanization of industry and by dependence on the mass media

of entertainment. In some of the most socially significant human activities (economic independence, upbringing of children, sexual behaviour, treatment of crime) a common tendency may be seen, towards the abdication of responsibility and the seeking of immediate satisfactions.

The Whiteleys find two contrasting views of morality current in our society. The first (and older) view regards moral principles as all-important: morality is self-justifying, and happiness is the reward of effort. According to the second view, the person is supremely important, happiness is self-justifying, and morality contributes to happiness. They criticize the latter view as tending

towards hedonism and the 'permissive morality'. Against this, they call for a return to absolute standards, self-discipline, duty and responsibility. But of necessity they also have to introduce a more dynamic aspect: men seek a 'justification' for their lives, an ideal, something to aspire to. And this is, in fact, the seeking for real happiness and self-fulfilment. If the Whiteleys had regarded this, rather than duty and moral effort, as giving the primary orientation to human life, their analysis of our present situation would perhaps have been more sympathetic and more hopeful.

*Austin Gaskell, O.P.*

ELEMENTS OF COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY by Stanislav Andreski. *Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 42s.*

There are so many inadequate and pretentious introductions to various aspects of sociological theory that a certain amount of apprehension may be forgiven in approaching Professor Andreski's book, and the patronizing tone of the first chapter on description and theory gives little reassurance. This is a great pity because this book contributes considerably to the clarification of the philosophical basis and methodological concepts of the social sciences and it should be influential in stimulating further research and discussion.

The first part of the book is probably of more use to those who have already been introduced to sociological concepts and methods. Much of what the author has to say is meaningful only in relation to the theories and approaches of other writers whose work he evaluates and refines. Although classic issues such as religion and capitalism are dealt with, we owe Professor Andreski a great deal for indicating to students that there are theorists outside the Weber-Durkheim constellation. The wider perspective which he gives through the breadth of his personal experiences and reading, apparent throughout the book, has been needed for some time, and no doubt this volume will become essential reading for sociology students; it certainly deserves to do so.

The author aims to show that comparative

analysis is not only of theoretical significance but is also related to policy judgments. The situations which he analyses as illustrations of his approach are those which would strike most people as important; he deals with so many questions of contemporary relevance that it is impossible to single them out, except to say that it is hardly surprising that the author of *Military Organization and Society* should include a section on violence and society. His case studies on racial conflict (South Africa, Latin America, and anti-semitism) and totalitarianism are well worth the general reader's attention, though the failure to document some rather startlingly wide generalizations of fact will antagonize some, particularly those with an historical training. The irritating queries which unsubstantiated statements arouse in the reader's mind probably slow the pace of these chapters far more than adequate documentation would.

It is not an easy book to read in spite of the author's polemic on jargon, but it is well worth the effort. It is inevitable that such a wide ranging volume should be open to criticism, but on balance it is outstandingly good value for money and well worth the attention of those whose interest in social theory and research goes beyond the superficial.

*Joan Brothers*