

SHORT REVIEWS



ENTERTAINING SATAN by John Putnam Demos. Oxford, \$25.00. Professor Demos examines "Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England," deliberately slighting the Salem affair. Salem, with its hysterical findings of universal guilt, was an aberration. The usual witchcraft trial (and there were numbers of them) was conducted with decency and, allowing for the legal reality of witchcraft, good sense. Evidence was carefully collected, the reliability of witnesses was seriously considered, and the accused were sometimes acquitted. Even when convicted, they were not always executed. Professor Demos has combined a general discussion of the belief in witchcraft and the reasons for the persistence of that belief with case histories of individual witches, who prove to have been, on the whole, the sort of people that still make annoying neighbors. They also make interesting reading.

A MIDNIGHT CLEAR by William Wharton. Knopf, \$12.95. Mr. Wharton's novel describes the misadventures of a half-dozen American soldiers posted to an abandoned chateau in the Ardennes forest at Christmastime in 1944. Four of the group, including the sergeant narrator, are still in their teens. All of them are inappropriately intelligent, sent to the front by snafu. They have neither taste nor talent for warfare, and their attempts to introduce a few civilized arrangements into their situation produce results that are semi-fantastic, grimly funny, and ultimately horrifying.

OLD POSSUM'S BOOK OF PRACTICAL CATS by T. S. Eliot. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$8.95/\$4.95 paper. Edward Gorey's drawings of Eliot's deservedly notorious cats—Mungojerrie, Skimbleshanks, Growltiger, and all—have the perfect combination of humanoid absurdity and delicate satire.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON by Noemie Emery. Putnam's, \$14.95. The great puzzle about Hamilton has always been, What possessed that extremely intelligent man to undertake the lunacy of a

duel with Aaron Burr? By combining a study of Hamilton's plainly stated beliefs about heroic patriotism with a clear account of the bitter political animosities of the time, Ms. Emery has constructed a plausible explanation of his suicidal folly. Her terse, well-written "intimate portrait" is frankly pro-Hamilton and acidly disrespectful of any Founding Fathers who disagreed with him, but enthusiasm is not a bad thing in a biographer. It makes for enthusiastic readers.

FLAMBARD'S CONFESSION by Marilyn Durham. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$17.95. King William Rufus (1056?-1100) always needed money, and his loyal servant Flambard, a primeval workaholic bureaucrat, knew how to extract it from everybody, including the Church. The monkish historians of the time gave the pair a bad name. Ms. Durham has used the limited facts and a great deal of ingenious invention to reconstruct the doings of Flambard and his master. The novel is long, full of action, and supplied with tart modern dialogue and what seems at times like a cast of thousands. It requires a certain tolerance for bloodshed, since it describes a society in which the only serious business of great men was claim-jumping each other's real estate. Their hobby was insurrection against the crown. Alas, poor Rufus.

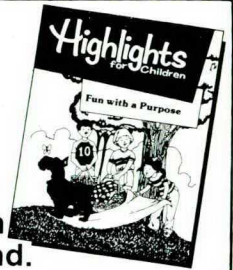
THE FOUR WISE MEN by Michael Tournier. Doubleday, \$14.95. Mr. Tournier has imagined a fourth king at Bethlehem, and this fellow, a silly, spoiled, frivolous Indian princeling, becomes an unexpectedly moving creation, a surrogate for all well-intentioned sufferers and blunderers. There is a real touch of magic in this novel.

MARIENBAD by Sholom Aleichem. Putnam's, \$13.95. Aliza Shevrin, the translator, modestly explains that his English cannot reproduce the hilarious trilingual wit of Aleichem's original text. He has, however, reproduced the novel's mischievous comedy of gossip, jealousy, and deceit, revealed through the idiosyncratic letters of prosperous Warsaw Jews romping about turn-of-the-century Marienbad. It is all very funny indeed.

ABUSING SCIENCE by Philip Kitcher. MIT, \$15.00. The recent attempts by religious fundamentalists to sneak Adam and Eve into school science courses under the alias of "creationism" have im-

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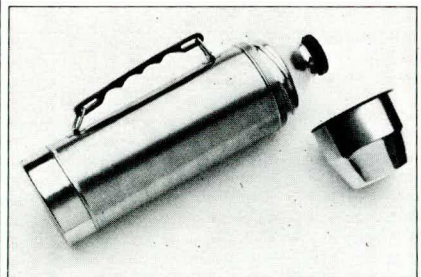
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