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Books of the Day

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY
by
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The Magic of My Youth. By Arthur Calder-Marshall. Hart-Davis.
Pp. 226. 12s. 6d.

This is an experiment in autobiography, a product of what Mr Calder-Marshall calls a "creative memory." What makes it uncommonly interesting is that he has frankly used the devices of fiction in organizing his material and yet leaves us with a strong impression of essential truth. The facts may not have been quite like this, yet there is an unusual sense of actuality. The scene painter's distortions come off; the set looks fine from the stalls, and there sits Mr Calder-Marshall, too, looking at his youth. It is precisely this distance in autobiography that usually causes trouble. Emotional memory is capricious; facts are sacred. But facts are arbitrary too: the assumption that they are of prime significance in this field is implicitly arrogant. As if to offset this writers tend to tread among the facts with an apologetic and often false humility. If a good deal of autobiographical writing seems faintly ridiculous this basic contradiction may be the cause.

Here the pitfall is avoided. The people in Mr Calder-Marshall's memory are presented in the round, as a novelist presents them. They emerge with a clarity and point beyond anything usually cast up by memory's muddy flow; on the other hand, they are closer to earth than a mere day-dreamer's upstarts. The book is novel-like too in having a structural theme—the interest in ritual magic, which, the writer tells us, had been "the last refuge of my adolescence." Lurking in the background like an evil rumour is the figure of Aleister Rowley, the diabolist. Mr Calder-Marshall's account of his eventual meeting with Crowley is a good example of his effective, unforced climaxes. He found the self-styled Beast of the Revelation in a restaurant, looking rather like a stockbroker and writ-

ing out not hieroglyphs but a careful shopping list. He had cherished an idea of pure evil personified, and what he found was "this impure character, trying rheumily to hypnotise me."