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BOOKS OF THE DAY

The Nineteen-Twenties

A bizarre collection of oddities enlivens "The Magic of My Youth" (Hart-Davis, 12s 6d), Arthur Calder-Marshall's autobiographical sketch of life in the twenties. The first is Vickybird, the eccentric poet of Steyning, who was in his youth a colleague of the notorious Aleister Crowley and who, report ran, was turned by him into a zebra in the middle of the Sahara.

When Calder-Marshall goes to Oxford he meets "Auntie Helen," who behind her wrought-iron grill, selects a day for him to come to tea when "it is early closing and the stars are right." Finally he encounters the ambiguous Crowley himself and finds his devil incarnate nothing but "a shaggy and sorry old gentleman, trying to outstare me across a table."

Incidents, as well as characters, are selected and described with a novelist's art. Crowley's dubious spells and Bloomsbury pubs make together a picture of a decade in which black magic, not bombs, could form the subject of speculation.