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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

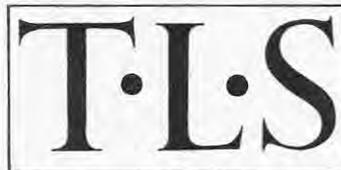
SOME REVIEWS OF BOOKS BY IDRIES SHAH

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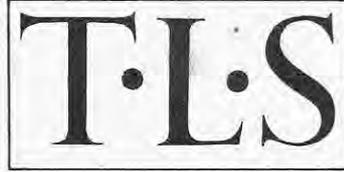
SHAH, SAYED IDRIES. *Destination Mecca.* 192 pp. Octagon Press. 30s.

Like his father, Sardar Iqbal Ali Shah, Sayed Idries Shah has done much to explain the world of Islam to Westerners and in particular, to promote the study of Sufi philosophy among English-speaking people. Both are great travellers, with the knack of penetrating into places, and meeting personalities often entirely inaccessible to other writers. In this lively book, Sayed Idries, relives a two-year period of travel and study which he undertook some years ago — at a time, indeed, when King Farouk was still reigning in Egypt and Sayed Abdur-Rahman El Mahdi was still alive in the Sudan. His lively observation and his powers of description make this “personally conducted tour” of the Middle East as exciting as a good novel, especially as the author’s Afghan origins and distinguished lineage secured him access to quarters which no European traveller could hope to reach. Much of what he writes illuminates factors of permanent importance in the Middle East; and no one can read this book without carrying away a lasting impression of the vigour and vitality of Islamic culture, and of the many surprising manifestations of that culture in the Asian world of today.



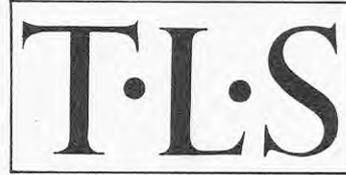
SHAH, IDRIES. *The Dermis Probe*.
191 pp. Cape. 35s.

In this collection of stories and anecdotes Saiyid Idries Shah once again draws upon the almost inexhaustible store of Sufi tradition and writings. The burden of many of them, conveyed with wisdom and humour, is that, in time, even the best of conventional ways of thinking become a cramping influence, and need to be looked at with the kind of scepticism which the Sufis brought to bear upon traditional scholarship. The title-story, which has been filmed, clothes in space-age terminology a tale told in turn by Hakim Majdud Sanai and Jalaludin Rumi; it has found its way into such famous Persian collections as *Tales of a Parrot* and *Fables of Pilpai*. Four blind men, the story runs, encountered an elephant. One felt the ear and said: "This is a fan." The next touched a leg and said: "No – it is a pillar." The third felt the trunk: "Ah, it is a snake." The fourth grasped the tail: "You are all wrong – it is a rope." This age-old warning against mistaking the parts for the whole and failing to see the wood for the trees is conveyed anew by the wafflings of members of "The Commission of World Scientists" when confronted by an over-close-up television view of the elephant's hide. It is deftly done, in the true Sufi tradition.



SHAH IDRIES. *Thinkers of the East.* Studies in Experimentalism. 198 pp. Cape. £2.10.

In Arabic, the same root signifies both "the east" and "light" or "illumination". For this reason, Saiyyid Idries Shah is justified in the title which he has chosen for this further volume of extracts from the almost inexhaustible corpus of Sufi lore and legend, even though the region from which the majority of the Masters emanate — the Middle East to Europeans — is for Oriental readers the Near West. The author, for long recognized as the leading interpreter of Sufi methods and practice to the Western world, has gathered together from many different sources a series of anecdotes and stories, some recorded and others orally transmitted, which illustrate the ancient but still continuing instructional work of the men known in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards as the illuminati. Their teaching lies at the very heart of many revealed religions: but it is their insistence upon the distinction between wisdom and mere learning, their opposition to pedantry and formalism, and their emphasis upon the growth and



development of the individual seeker after truth which constitute their main appeal to the modern man who finds current materialistic outlooks and attitudes insufficient for his needs. Their instructional methods, though contrary to canons unquestioned for centuries, are now seen to anticipate, if not to extrapolate, the conclusions suggested by modern psychological discoveries. The extracts themselves, racy translated and very readable, contain an inner significance discoverable only through careful study and reflection.