Moses Gaster (1856-1939) was a nineteenth century man in temperament, breadth of knowledge and scholarly productivity. An incorrigible romanticist, he valued antiquity for its own sake, often dating back texts and manuscripts, erring in hundreds of years, as if placing them in the romantic mystic light of days of old would add to their value regardless of their actual quality. He was a Rumanian-Jewish Jacob Grimm in more than one way. In his youth and early adulthood Gaster was involved both in the Rumanian and the Jewish national movements, the cause of both which he served. His main contribution, however, was scholarly rather than political, in unraveling the national literary and linguistic foundations of both peoples. His dissertation was devoted to Rumanian historical linguistics ("Zur rumänischen Lautgeschichte. Die Guttural Tenuis," Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie 2 [1879], 355-88), and his magnum opus in the field of Rumanian studies was a two volume collection of old texts of popular literature from the 16th to the 19th centuries, which contains samples of narratives in local dialects, Chrestomatie Romana, Texte tipărite si manuscrise sec. XVI-XIX dialectale si populare, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1894; București: Socucu & Co., 1891). His contribution to research in Samaritan literature and Jewish studies followed the same direction. In 1906 Gaster visited Palestine and contacted the Samaritans whose literature and manuscripts he began to explore and publish. Being a folklorist and a linguist he also insightfully recorded their language as it was then spoken. Gaster had a similar concern in early manuscripts as he had for Jewish popular and folk literature; he edited, translated and interpreted Haggadic text, medieval legends and apocryphal books. The best known of these is the now classic The Exempla of the Rabbis (Leipzig: Asia Publication Co., 1924).

In all these versatile studies Gaster displays a breadth of erudition in European and Oriental folklore, annotating texts extensively in the true comparitivist spirit of his time. Often controversial, and, as other scholars proved, not all the time correct, his scholarship in all three fields helped to establish the groundwork for future research. In a career that spans over sixty-five years he published 281 scholarly articles and books. Considering that forty years of this period he spent in a state of near blindness, resorting to the aid of readers and his memory, this is an unusual feat. The present volumes of his collected essays cover a period of over fifty years. Gaster himself selected the papers. They were originally published in this form in 1925-28; the remaining stock of books was destroyed in the air raids over London during the Second World War. Since both the original edition and the journals in which these essays were first published are no longer available the present reprint edition fills a need in folklore studies in general and Jewish folklore in particular. The first two volumes include articles and texts mainly in English, but also in
German, French and Rumanian. The third volume is devoted primarily to Hebrew texts and essays. The subjects of these essays reflect the wide scope of Moses Gaster's scholarship and range from Rumanian folklore to Samaritan legends to Jewish Haggadah apocrypha and mysticism. Many articles have lasting value as they include texts which are otherwise unavailable; other essays have an historical significance, reflecting the state of folklore scholarship and theories during the lifetime of Moses Gaster.

Of particular interest in this reprint edition is the "Prolegomenon," by Moses Gaster's son, Theodor, who is a known scholar of the ancient Near East in his own right. He successfully maintains a balance between on the one hand a critical evaluation of his father's works, social and academic position and personal temperament, and on the other hand a description imbued with understandable sentimentality of a home of a learned man in which an endless array of books and an equally endless stream of visitors are its dominant features. Such reminiscences have their own value for the history of folklore scholarship.

There Was a King in Ireland...: Five Tales From Oral Tradition, collected and translated by Myles Dillon. 114 pp. Illustration, no index. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971. $5.75.

Reviewed by Linna-Margaret Funk.

This collection of "five tales from oral tradition" was made by Dillon in the early 1930's, at a time when scholars and amateurs alike were caught by a burst of fresh enthusiasm for Irish folklife studies -- enthusiasm that would shortly result in the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission.

Unlike many of the collectors in Ireland, Dillon has had a distinguished academic career, teaching in prominent American and British universities. His volume, however, is not in the strictest sense a scholarly one. In his brief foreword, there is a token acknowledgement of today's more sophisticated collecting techniques: he describes the circumstances of his collecting, carefully identifying informants, and then offers comparative notes for each of the tales. These notes consist largely of references to other collections in which variants of the tale appear and an occasional explanation of a Gaelic term used in the text. The references listed are not as complete as those named in the notes accompanying O'Sullivan's Folktales of Ireland and the motif breakdown is at best minimal.

Perhaps more disappointing than the sketchy documentation is the absence of historical analysis. The tales are part of the heroic and mythical cycles, comparable to Section II of O'Sullivan's book, "Kings and Warriors," which are identified by many scholars as the most significant of the large body of Irish tales because of their length and their unique tradition relative to other European tale types. The questions of pre-Christian origins and the relationship of myth and oral history are, unfortunately, not considered.