



The Stammering Century (New York Review Books Classics)

Gilbert Seldes

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Gilbert Seldes, the author of *The Stammering Century*, writes:

This book is not a record of the major events in American history during the nineteenth century. It is concerned with minor movements, with the cults and manias of that period. Its personages are fanatics, and radicals, and mountebanks. Its intention is to connect these secondary movements and figures with the primary forces of the century, and to supply a background in American history for the Prohibitionists and the Pentecostals; the diet-faddists and the dealers in mail-order Personality; the play censors and the Fundamentalists; the free-lovers and eugenisists; the cranks and possibly the saints. Sects, cults, manias, movements, fads, religious excitements, and the relation of each of these to the others and to the orderly progress of America are the subject.

The subject is of course as timely at the beginning of the twenty-first century as when the book first appeared in 1928. Seldes's fascinated and often sympathetic accounts of dreamers, rogues, frauds, sectarians, madmen, and geniuses from Jonathan Edwards to the messianic murderer Matthias have established *The Stammering Century* not only as a lasting contribution to American history but as a classic in its own right.

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