

Books of Special Interest

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author's preface that, as he is too little concerned with "Denmark," with the whole world exterior to the soul, so conversely he is too much concerned with "Hamlet," with literary prototypes. His elaborate parallels seem to indicate certainly that he has asked himself too often "What would Hamlet or Werther have done in 1930?" or even "How would Shakespeare or Goethe have written in 1930?" and too little "What would the character I conceive have done in the circumstances I put him in?"

The aims of the Carrefour Press must command everyone's sympathy, but in these two books they cannot be said to succeed. If these have avoided the extreme obscurity which disfigures certain highly original writers, they are themselves far from clear, and are both highly derivative. One may continue to watch the Carrefour publications with hope, but the first two volumes are a disappointment, exquisite but flimsy.

A Lively Life

VOLTAIRE. By C. E. VULLIAMY. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1930. \$3.50.
Reviewed by E. PRESTON DARGAN
University of Chicago

FROM this biography Voltaire emerges as a very active spider, whose web covered much of northern Europe. Scampering from the fogs of Greenwich to the pseudo-Versailles of Lunéville, from the versions contrived by the old Duchesse de Maine to those enacted for Frederick the Great, the agile spider darts, frequently bringing home a foolish enemy, over whose corpse he may ironically gloat. We see him prostrating the unhappy Maupertuis or the despicable Desfontaines. We find him never resting until Ferney finally became the center of the now majestic web; there he lay, much swollen (in reputation) by his unsavory meals, his prehensile weapons ever ready and turned outwards. He had nearly always been in exile, always souffrant, never submissive, a many-legged creature of infinite excursions, alarms, and retreats.

There is much that is plausible, if not exactly novel, about this portrait. The biographer declares from the outset his intention

of dwelling rather on the personality than on the works of his subject. He maintains, debatably, that it was the personality that made Voltaire's fame then and afterwards. Before forty, he became noted as "singular, violent, and audacious." Ten years later he had deepened the impression among friends and enemies; and posterity still views him largely from the personal angle. Apparently people either accept the Houdon bust or balk at Musset's evocation of the sleeper with the "hideous smile."

A darting, deceitful, unstable creature, tossing off influences from the center of his "revolving egoism," capable of being the meanest of mankind, then turning to noble deeds—is this all that is left of Voltaire?

For the general public, yes. And fifty million moderns can't be wrong—except perhaps in their willingness to take the surface for the substance and in the steady horror of the Anglo-Saxon audience towards dealing with the continuity of ideas. Otherwise, would it be natural for Mr. Vulliamy to speak of Voltaire's as a "most unnatural philosophy," to neglect him altogether as a crude precursor of the "higher" Biblical criticism, and to ignore his positive social reforms? Are not a man's ideas an essential part of his *dossier*, even of his portrait? Many Frenchmen have thought so; but our biographer holds that this writer's "true meaning . . . is often obscured by a critical study of his writings" (!). As if the bee's true meaning were obscured by its honey and as if the wasp were complete without its sting! Of course, many of Voltaire's works are out of date, or else their substance has become absorbed; but not so many as Mr. Vulliamy thinks; two at least of the histories are still influential, and it is doubtful whether the tales will ever be generally forgotten. However, the present biographer must have forgotten them when he declared that Voltaire was "no artist."

But perhaps we are too severe. Viewing the book from its own standpoint, let us admit that as popular biography the sketch is pleasantly written and that as a whole it is fairly reliable. The style is usually good, with occasional dips into the vernacular. One feature is the translation, into quaint eighteenth century English, of a great many

of Voltaire's interesting letters. Mr. Vulliamy has quoted mainly from the collected correspondence in the Moland edition, scarcely using the many thousand uncollected letters to be found elsewhere. His claim that "every recent source of information has been drawn upon" must be taken guardedly in the absence of even a short bibliography. Undigested are various recent studies bearing on Voltaire's Anglomania and his relations to English thinkers; some points about the Encyclopedists are also left rather vague. There are errors about the composition or publication of several works. But these may be considered minor inaccuracies as compared with the conclusion, where Voltaire is inadequately treated as regards his role and his influence.

Altogether, another smart rapid-fire biography, allowing few pauses for reflection. Mr. Vulliamy would probably argue that Voltaire himself hardly ever paused.

Chamber of Horrors

MURDER FOR LOVE. By IONE QUINBY.
Covici, Friede. 1931. \$2.50.
Reviewed by LEILA TAYLOR

IT is a ghoulish piece of work Ione Quinby has done in this novel. The book is a recounting in detail of seven more or less recent murder cases, wherein the killer has each time been a woman, and the case itself has become what we blithely call celebrated. Its title is something of a misnomer—an effort to give a romantic twist to the murderous doings of this sorry group, two of whom were perhaps goaded to their deed by the pangs of love; but the other five poisoned and hacked and shot their way to their ends goaded by nothing more romantic than a passion for money.

From the ever-increasing stream of female murderers who have their little day in our headlines, Miss Quinby has singled out for her purposes Ruth Snyder, the Queens Village blonde who struck for freedom and \$97,000 insurance money; Clara Smith Haman who shot the politician Jake Hamon, when he threatened to discard her as an impediment to his career; Belle Gunness whose "murder farm" netted her thousands in insurance money for every husband she caused to disappear; Tillie Klimek, the poisoner with the mind of a child; Catherine Cassler, Wanda Stopa, and Grace Lusk.

A grisly procession, not rendered more alluring by the fact that they were almost all the perpetrators of crimes carefully premeditated. This, Miss Quinby points out, is a distinguishing trait of the female killer, the male being more apt to act on impulse. Each of these women she has made the subject of a sort of novelette, studded with dates and facts, painstakingly culled from newspaper records. The material in itself is stark and powerful, qualities which the writer allows to escape her in a welter of words most of the time. There is one exception to this, however—the description of Jennie, the little pale-faced orphan girl, held on the Gunness "murder farm," coming unawares upon the unspeakable Belle at her bloody work. (For this mistake, it may be said, Jennie went the way that Belle's husbands and suitors had gone before.) But invariably the writing is padded, florid, and detailed where the effect might have been heightened by reticence. Perhaps it takes the genius of a Poe to narrate pure horror with the overtone of strangeness that invests it with significance and mordant beauty. But Miss Quinby, who has hobnobbed with murderers as a newspaper reporter in Chicago, and conducted a school in jail for them and had them teach her how to crochet, has probably by now lost this feeling of strangeness. As a result, her book turns out a pedestrian account of these turgid souls which reminds one of nothing so much as a trip through what used to be the "chamber of horrors" at the old New York Eden Musée, where was depicted in wax as goodly a crowd of murderers as ever came together. If you enjoyed that sort of thing then, you will enjoy "Murder for Love" now. It might be mentioned that of the seven women slayers included in the book, only one suffered capital punishment from the state for her crime.

The international memorial to Rupert Brooke, the famous young English poet who died in the Great War, was unveiled on Easter Day, on the island of Skyros, where the poet is buried, by the Greek Premier, M. Venizelos. One of those who attended the ceremony was an intimate friend and distinguished fellow-poet of Brooke's, namely Lascelles Abercrombie, now Professor of English Literature at Leeds University.

A Thrilling FIRST NOVEL "FIND"



THIS is the story of Seth Shone, a mighty poacher of ancient and romantic Mercia.

Caught one shiny night in Squire Marple's woods, he killed the keeper—was shipped—and returned white-haired but hard-set to avenge himself of those who had wronged him. He built "the image house"—crowned it with hewn-stone images of his enemies—cursed them and lived to see the curse prevail. His house still stands near the home of Beatrice Tunstall. The images

are still there. His grandson still believes in them as the best way to down one's

foes. This book is a "return to the verities"—a rich, magnificently simple novel of love and courage, destined to be regarded as a pastoral classic. People are already comparing it with Mary Webb's *Precious Bane*. It marches grandly to the tune of the old poaching song, "O 'tis my delight of a shiny night, in the season of the year..."

THE SHINY NIGHT

by Beatrice Tunstall

A beautiful book—430 pages—with wood-cuts by Freda Bone \$2.50 Doubleday, Doran

Books of Special Interest

Bludgeoning Satire

BLACK NO MORE. By GEORGE S. SCHUYLER. New York: The Macaulay Company. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by LEONARD EHRLICH

IN this world of Mr. Schuyler's devising, it is 1933, and Junius Crookman, a Negro doctor, has happened upon a serum which will turn black people white. He carries the experiment through. It succeeds; soon there is no longer a black belt, "passing" is a relic of an older furtive time, there are no more Negroes in America. That is, no more people with dark skins; racial characteristics remain unchanged. This situation is the point of departure; the book's satiric concern is with the consequences. The conception was shrewd, bold; the possibilities various for incisive devastation.

I formed a white man's estimate of the work. I could report upon its venomous spirit, its artistic negligibility, the coarse bludgeoning substance. I had my idea—but what would one of Mr. Schuyler's race think of it? So I went to her and asked her to read the book. Later, slowly turning the pages, she said to me in low, bitter pride: "These are not my people. He has not understood." She is thirty, with clear, nut-brown skin and braided hair; and from her round, homely face her black eyes shine with intelligence and melancholy fire. I have had many long talks with her. Her mother was a Creole, her father a magnificent full-blooded Negro, an assemblyman in Texas. "I come of kings," she says often; "not slaves. My pa's fathers were kings in Africa." She has worked in the cotton regions, been a school-teacher in Georgia. She has seen with her own eyes two lynchings; one of the men hanged and burned was her brother. Now she is a clerk in a Harlem factory. At night she goes to college to study writing; she has a deep dream of writing true things about her black folk. I know she will never be a writer, and I cannot tell her this easily; she will always grope for expression. But in the richness of her feeling and her awareness of others she is already an intuitive artist in living. To this Negress I brought the book "Black No More." "He has not understood," she said.

I did not altogether agree, but I knew what she meant. I thought of Sherwood Anderson's word (in his "Notebook" of some ten years ago) upon our new Nobel Prize winner; he speaks of the "dreary waste" of Lewis's prose, calls it barren and less than human because almost nowhere in it are apparent the gleam and the shadow of living, nowhere the heightening moment. It simply was not life as Anderson knew it, just as Mr. Schuyler's brutal projection was not the beautiful and relentlessly tragic life this fine young Negress knew. Though hers was a raw emotional perception, uncritical, and in good part delusion, deriving its bias from what she feared and hated, and its color from her vague dream of what might be, in Sherwood Anderson's sense it was a truest criticism. It meant nothing to her that the intention of Mr. Schuyler's work was satiric, and that satire in its large antiseptic function has little patience for measure or justness. It was all a calumny.

But there is a residuum of truth in "Black No More" and several delectable ironies. Particularly choice is Mr. Schuyler's vision of the psychochemically blanched Negro, one Matthew Fisher, organizing the Knights of Nordica in the heart of the South to preserve the purity of the white race. Eventually under the author's sometimes ingenious handling a social revolution comes about—the whites are segregated and discriminated against, blackness is at a premium. The beginning of the action has been indicated, and the outcome; there is occasional hilarity between, frequent dullness, and much very bad writing. The portrait of Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, founder of the National Social Equality League, graduate of Harvard, Yale, and Copenhagen; Dr. Napoleon Wellington Jackson, who looked like a tall ape and wrote sorrow-songs; Mr. Walter Williams, "a white man with pale blue eyes and wavy auburn hair," who spoke proudly of his Negro blood; Santope Licorice, Provisional President of Africa, Admiral of the African Navy, Knight Commander of the Nile; these all are instantly recognizable (Mr. Schuyler seems to have paid off some personal scores) and will cause much writhing and gnashing of molars in Harlem. Incidentally, they reveal best the book's overwhelming defect as a novel; it suffers from the author's bitter need for destruction, and under such stress loses all relation to art and reality. As a satire it is excessively underlined; Mr. Schuyler goes bludgeoning his

way through it, striking down right and left the straw men he has set up, and the house of cards. Most often it will merely indulge grown-up children of both races.

I think again of the mute, dark girl who dreams of writing true things about her people, I think of the kind of truth she might get down on paper if a voice were given her. Negro authors—Claude McKay comes to mind—have been giving forth what they believe white readers want; or like William Burghardt DuBois, shrilling dithyrambic frustrations; or now, as in George S. Schuyler's novel, capering as embittered buffoons, mocking themselves and all others. Some day—"Not Without Laughter" was a courageous though partial beginning—a Negro artist, combining articulateness with the passion, the hunger, the wealth in suffering of my dark thirty-year-old friend, will create a work. Then we shall finally get a true, rich book upon the black soul in our midst.

The Fear-Oppressed

A HAIR DIVIDES. By CLAUDE HOUGHTON. Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by FRANCIS McDERMOTT

Claude Houghton, who has been attracting increasing attention in England and America, and who with the publication last year of "I Am Jonathan Scrivener" reached the general body of readers, combines originality with intelligence, displaying, particularly, great gifts of imagination and psychological insight.

Houghton deals mainly with mental psychology. In "I Am Jonathan Scrivener" he described the subtle and self-revealing reactions of a group of persons to a dominating and disturbing personality. "A Hair Divides" is a study of the mind of a man obsessed and haunted by fear. It has more actual plot than its predecessor. It could in fact be called a "thriller," for violent death occurs in its early stages. But it is a new type of "thriller" in which physical action is subordinated to the main psychological theme.

Gordon Rutherford, a young writer, is the only witness to the accidental death of an acquaintance, Martin Feversham. The attendant circumstances are most skilfully contrived by the author to present Rutherford with a dramatic dilemma. The death can be disclosed by him only under the gravest risk of being suspected, and probably hanged as the murderer. The death, if not disclosed by him, will quite likely be indefinitely concealed—provided that he can get rid of the body. But to dispose of the body and conceal the accident will destroy his slender chance of convincing a jury of his innocence, if he is caught.

Rutherford feels no confidence in the power of the truth. He solves his dilemma by acting as though he were the murderer. He destroys the body and for greater safety leaves the country at the first opportunity.

For twenty years the mystery of Feversham's disappearance is unsolved. Eventually, in a most dramatic manner, Rutherford is confronted with the certain disclosure of the facts and his equally certain conviction of the murder of Feversham.

In between its sensational opening and dramatic end, the novel is a brilliant study of a fear-oppressed mind. Inwardly and outwardly, Rutherford was completely changed by his decisions of one night. Thereafter he is a man in the grip of psychic powers. The power to write drops from him and with it, ambition. He has to drug his mind with hard work. He loses all inner life, formerly his most precious possession. His real personality can never dissociate itself from the overwhelming memory of the past. When fear of exposure leaves him in the course of time, it is succeeded by a worse obsession. He begins to doubt whether he is in fact innocent of the death of Feversham, to think that the "accident" was really a murder.

The picture of this man harassed and persecuted by fear is one of the best pieces of work in English fiction of recent years. Every turn and twist of the mind of the unfortunate man is delineated with great imaginative reality; the mental turmoil comes tense and vivid off the printed page.

"A Hair Divides" can be recommended for most of the qualities that go to make a first class novel. It is most carefully constructed; its characterization is profound and consistent; its writing is lucid and economical; its dialogue is sparkling, witty and wise. It is brimful of intelligence and original thinking.

Mr. Houghton's potentiality is considerable. There are still faults in his work,

(Continued on next page)

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