

nineteenth century is, in some sort, a parable of our own time. No sensitive writer, least of all Sylvia Townsend Warner, fails to distinguish between the death-principle and the life-principle of a period, or in which sort of existence each lies. There are two kinds of human beings—those who seek living death and those who revolt from it. Sophia was the latter kind. In her first incarnation she is anything but a sympathetic character. Her coldness encountering Minna's warmth, for all Minna's absurdity, kindles her into heroism.

## On Both Sides of Tobacco Road

*SWAMP SHADOW.* By Katharine Hamill. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$2.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

**A** YANKEE and a Republican, Katharine Hamill might have been regarded as a literary carpetbagger seeking her story of the South in one of its corners, unswept by the present or by "progress," if Southerners themselves had not looked as clearly before at the persisting primitives in the human picture of the region. The "poor white" has been written about only less than the Negro. Only purblind patriots any longer deny that they exist. True patriots should be as grateful to Miss Hamill for pointing out the vigor and desire which sometimes still stir among them, as readers will be for this lively and veracious tale out of their lives.

Old Joe Roper's folks are people. Patriarch, without pretension to morality, he possessed a dignity and a strength. And, if he produced the anemic, tonic-taking sisters, Ruth and Rebekah, the sly Bartow, the drunken, half-wild Thomas, and the timid Willie, he also was father of Rachel, who was fine and strong even when she deliberately mixed good works and sin to a result in murder. Hoodlums and halfwits, childbirth-broken women and graveyards full of their babies have their places in old Joe's Mississippi Gulf coast world. But there is more: coon dogs and good hunting, teeming shrimp seines, racy humor, and life without undue labor. Indeed, Miss Hamill's coast folk, more like the Appalachian cove people than the hungry inhabitants of Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road," are concerned with the simplicities of living but free from fierce concern over the mere maintenance of life. There still lingers about them more of the independence of the frontier than of the degradation of the exploited.

Miss Hamill knows her people, their language, their lives, their hearts. But better than that, she likes them. Careless of reform, she is amused and moved by a people. Her readers will be, too.

# Two Psychological Thrillers

*THIS GUN FOR HIRE.* By Graham Greene. New York: Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$2.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

**P**ROBABLY the best novel Graham Greene has written is "The Man Within," but his new rapid-fire novel of action is a hum-dinger. The only other work of his I have read is "The Name of Action" which, though exciting, didn't seem to me to compare with his first book. Now, however, he has scored a bull's-eye again for the sort of thing he set out to do. His killer, "Raven," is a human being who extraordinarily combines vileness and spasmodic nobility. The higher-ups who control him in so melodramatic a fashion are convincing in their cynical nefariousness. The issue that joins seems at the start of no particular size, and turns out to be vastly important. Yes, I am trying to hide the plot from you, because this is the type of book that positively leaps along from incident to incident, and carries you breathlessly with it. That, I know, has been said of a good many mere detective or mystery stories; but in this instance it is true of a book written by a man with a streamlined style, a young writer with a masterly economy of words—one whose characters have breath and vitality. Extraordinary, too, is his understanding of sinners. Acky's letter to the lord bishop, near the end, while being worshipped by his crone of a wife, is a little masterpiece of description in itself. Anne and her man, who is the detective, hamper the book, though they're good "heavies." But Raven is a superb character and the study of his psychology enthralling. This is decidedly the book for one of those evenings when you want something easy to read and exciting which, at the same time, has some claim to being literature. The reason "This Gun for Hire" is a cut above the usual detective story lies in its exploration of the criminal mind, and the complete case history it gives of Raven. Yet the action is piling up every moment, and the suspense. If you have a "grim" shelf, this novel deserves to be added to it. In many ways it's a "corker"!

*STRANGE HOUSES.* By Cora Jarrett. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

**H**OW would it feel to wake up after a medical treatment, look into the mirror, and see some one else's reflection? To be compelled to go on with your own memories, your own personality, in the body of a total stranger? That is the idea out of which "Strange Houses" is written—the story of a middle-aged woman, happily married to a wealthy financier, who through an occult process exchanges all physical attributes with a chorus girl.

Thorne Smith, in "Turnabout," made this idea the basis of a farce. Mrs. Jarrett uses it for a psychological thriller, with overtones of Pirandello. These resemblances do not mean that "Strange

Houses" is not an original and thoroughly ingenious novel, as it decidedly is. The author relates it as a case treated by a young New York psychiatrist, and she gives it the reality of characterization, the familiarity of atmosphere indispensable to the credibility of a story of the supernatural.

"Strange Houses" can be read either as something that will purely and simply give you the creeps, or as a complex and mystifying puzzle. I found the second element dominating: the excitement is intellectual rather than emotional. Once the situation is set, what are the characters going to do about it? We wonder what kind of relationship Breen, the financier, can have with his strangely transfigured wife. For a long time we wonder where the chorus-girl herself—presumably inhabiting Mrs. Breen's body—will turn up. We wonder most of all what the end will be.

The final solution is not perfect (the only perfect explanation of a supernatural story is absence of explanation, as in "The Turn of the Screw") but it doesn't let you down hard. A more salient criticism is that Mrs. Jarrett writes so well that she tends to overwrite, weighting the situation with verbiage; she also lets in a couple of irrelevant love affairs. But none of this seriously hurts the interest. "Strange Houses" is excellent of its kind.



GRAHAM GREENE

# European Panorama

*THE TUMULT AND THE SHOUTING.*  
By George Slocombe. New York: The  
Macmillan Company. 1936. \$3.50.

Reviewed by  
PRINCE HUBERTUS LOEWENSTEIN

**H**ERE is a brilliant book, a book crowded with people, events, and pictures, a book embracing the last twenty-five years of world history. The reader is bound to feel that the author has known and experienced all he describes. He is an integral part of the story as well as its detached narrator. His story is clear and objective, almost entirely free from emotion, even at the points where it directly affects him. He is a truthful chronicler who conceals nothing and underlines nothing that is not in itself hidden or underlined.

The book offers no panaceas, no "world view" from author to reader, no deliberate philosophy. A philosophy is none the less implied together with the most important lesson to be drawn from it; mankind has not yet grasped the fact that it is going through the most momentous developments the world has ever known. The current events of today become the history of tomorrow. Events only a little removed seem to recede into the dark of past centuries. Locarno, Geneva, Thoiry appear one after another on Slocombe's pages—how long since it all happened? Turn back ten years—Briand is Foreign Minister of France, Sir Austen Chamberlain dominates the Foreign Office, Stresemann holds sway in Germany. The author knew this remarkable trio, separately and together. The first the son of a publican in Brittany, the second an English aristocrat, the third a member of the German lower middle class. Yet all three have a single thought in common: the concept of a Europe at peace with itself.



TCHICHERIN AND THE AUTHOR  
At Lausanne, 1922.

War must be no more; the "ultimate instrument of politics" from now on must be mutual guaranties and collective security. What a dream for mankind that has since seen the repudiation of the most solemn international obligations in the looming shadow of imminent catastrophe!

Innumerable names, countries, and men and women, flit through these pages. Mussolini in exile, Mussolini the revolutionary, and finally Mussolini dictator of Italy, whose press conference in Locarno Slocombe helped to disrupt.

Again there is Tchicherin, the high born aristocrat, communist by conviction, together with Lloyd George, son of a Welsh miner, liberal capitalist by growth and development. The author takes us through conference halls, antechambers, palaces, and prisons—we see the head of Gorguloff, slayer of the venerable French president, roll into the basket, amid the gruesome panoply of a state execution. We are led into refugee cafés in Paris, see the crown jewels of extinct czarism in Moscow; we are spirited away by turn to Egypt, India, and America.

A greater coherency might be desirable for a more successful journey. Yet even so what the author shows us is well worth seeing. The disjointedness of the book does in fact represent one of the greatest difficulties in describing it. The very abundance of material forces the author to a somewhat sketchy treatment of his story; dramatic incidents are flashed on the scene without any particular emphasis or integration; one cannot quote a single one without omitting a dozen like it.

The book begins and ends in a fog. London before the war with its hordes of believers and refugees, socialists who kept faith and those who later turned fascist. Malatesta, the last upright standard bearer of the Italy of Mazzini and Garibaldi. Kropotkin in the throes of the war psychosis for all his utopian socialism; Ferrer, martyr of Spanish freedom, and finally the English anarchists, described by Slocombe thus:

... they were atheists, republicans, communists . . . they hated and despised the State, the Army, the Police Force, the Church, but they also hated and despised the Labor Party, the various socialist sects, the immense Social Democratic Party of Germany and the trade unions. They saw no difference between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

Here Mr. Slocombe strikes a familiar note, for all this is known to us from our own experience. So the German communists declared on the very eve of Hitlerism that Social Democracy was the arch enemy just as the French communists are doing today, in spite of the "Popular Front" and governmental coalitions. They have learned nothing—



ARISTIDE BRIAND

neither the war nor barbarism has taught anyone anything. To all appearances humanity has come to a standstill.

The last pages belong to Hitler, the man of the "idée fixe," the man who cannot speak but addresses even a casual visitor in rhetorical terms; the neurotic who sees war as the only cure for Germany, while it is actually the projection of his own neurosis.

Dollfuss, pocket dictator of Austria, is likewise included. He was the man of the childlike smile, with the blood of two thousand workers on his hands, glorified at last in death. "Himself the instrument of tyranny," says Slocombe, "a tool of reaction, by a tragic and sublime paradox he became the first victim of a greater intolerance, the first martyr of Austrian liberty."

With this the book points to the future—more properly to Austria, where the attention of the world soon must be focussed. Large dictatorships swallow small ones, the strong and unscrupulous engulf the weak and unscrupulous. Who then shall speak of ethics? Slocombe certainly does not; but he does indicate where ethics can be found. The conscience of the world is its voice in spite of all. For out of the confused seemingly meaningless whirl emerges a feeling that might is not all; that there was a time in Europe—ten years ago did we say?—when all indications pointed to the possibility of peaceful reconstruction.

The book closes with an account of present-day emigration, not unlike that preceding the world war. Says Slocombe:

The political exiles of the pre-war epoch, pilgrims, pursuing a mirage called freedom, have become the dictators and autocrats of today. The outcasts, the proscribed, the banned and hunted pacifists of the war period have been exalted to the highest offices in the land.

Who can fortell the morrow, when all things change so quickly? Mr. Slocombe's vivid account of the past and present may at least facilitate the understanding of the problems confronting us.