

the Armistead household, is an extraordinary portrait—product of an era which held its women to domestic matters, and somewhat less remarkable but still real is her brother Ludo, who drifts to peace in an Anglican brotherhood.

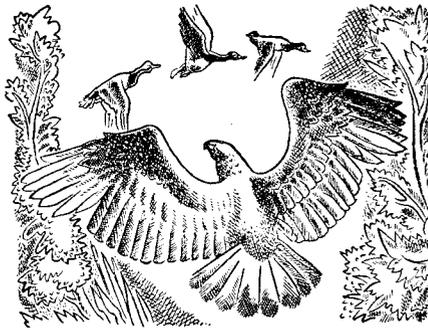
The Hinchcliffe family are, for one reason or another, less successful. The parents are excellent, but the younger generation remains somewhat shadowy, though in Grace, the self-reliant woman of the book, Miss Bentley creates a recognizable type from the emancipation-of-women epoch. The youngest generation is less vividly seen, partly because they do not emerge from merely typical roles.

The background is Yorkshire, with a dash or two of London thrown in. But Yorkshire remains, quite properly, the substance of the story. The war generation goes off to the trenches and dies or returns to Yorkshire; the Yorkshire mind, product of the dissidence of dissent, remains, whether at home or in the capital, indestructibly itself. Yorkshire is the center of the changing world, but the center of Yorkshire is the textile business, whose fortunes and misfortunes create almost a secondary plot as the Armisteads and the Hinchcliffes rise to war-made prosperity or sink to desperate genteel poverty in the post-war depression. Only the ending is weak, and the ending, significantly, takes place in London, where Geoffrey and Kay, in whose veins various permutations of the family blood intermingle, too neatly incline, the one to fascism, the other to communism.

The texture of the prose, though the prose is no way remarkable for special stylistic beauty, is everywhere rich and full, save toward the end. The pages are packed with impressions, incidents, tragic emotions, comedy, and the sufferings of adolescence. The conversations of the Hinchcliffe family are, it is true, stilted, and there are times when Grace and Laura talk too neatly because the author wants to secure representative effect. But these weaknesses dwindle in the general impression of the thoroughly English quality of scene and characters, the excellently human significance of the whole. All in all, "Sleep in Peace" seems to me one of the more impressive books of 1938.



FROM THE JACKET DESIGN OF  
"SLEEP IN PEACE"



DRAWING BY LYND WARD  
From "Birds against Men."

## Birds As People

*BIRDS AGAINST MEN.* By Louis J. Halle, Jr. With Drawings by Lynd Ward. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THIS really delightful book is another document in the war of the behaviorists against the classificationists. I do not mean to smother beneath long words its excellently written chapters on wild life. The readers of the essay on Akbar the noble falcon and Shelmerdine the sulky hawk need not bother with implications, nor does the obituary notice of that extraordinary parrot, Lorenzo, suggest an argument.

Mr. Halle has made three regions his own in this book:—the semi-wild country near Pound Ridge in the New York country residence area, the tropic ocean, and the tropical forests of Central America. In the first he has a wild hemlock lake, and a stretch of impenetrable meadows where, as on the Concord River, the complex life of nature manifests itself as vividly as in a continent. He sees the first flights of Spring birds come over the horizon from the South. He steals the young hawks from their nests and trains them to fly from his wrist. When "the spring foliage droops motionless from the trees of its own weight, blanketing the woods with heavy green masses"—he watches the red-shouldered hawks in their nuptial flights.

On the sea he is less at home, but there is no better description anywhere of the man-of-war bird, most sensational of flying creatures. And in the tropic forests, where he was a worker, his account of a single clearing where toucans, parrots, and caciques feed, fly, and sport among ancient stone images of the Mayan golden age, is a little masterpiece of description.

But the key to his book will be found in the preface. "I had the choice of painting a stuffed bird lying with its feet in the air on a laboratory table, or painting it on the wing in a setting that included the world." This is a behaviorist's book,

like the "Excursions" of Thoreau. It has sufficient ornithology behind it; but it is not ornithology as science writes it. Mr. Halle has a philosophy, which is, very simply, that man is only an extension of brute nature, and he is therefore as interested in the personality of his winged neighbors as in the habits of his kind. But habits and personalities—the zooming play flight of the pigeon flock, the wisdom below intelligence of the parrot tribe, the aristocracy of the hawk, the kingbirds' conquest of the kingdom—is precisely what ornithology has been willing to minimize.

To describe these personalities, these habits, requires a subtle and skillful style, which Mr. Halle possesses, and also a sympathy with the unmorality of the feathered world which earlier literary writers on bird life have often failed in. He is sometimes a little diffuse, sometimes overwrites his effects, would do better to leave out some of his generalizations on pre-history and stick to the bird in hand or in the bush which he describes so admirably. But surely we have here a new and valuable recruit for the writing of that nature literature which for two hundred years has been a feature of American writing.

## The Dominant Female

*DAUGHTERS AND SONS.* By I. Compton-Burnett. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

MISS COMPTON-BURNETT is an original and uncompromising novelist. Her comic gifts have been compared to those of Bernard Shaw, which seems scarcely defensible; and she has also been likened to Jane Austen. Here the likeness is altogether more aptly drawn. There is a resemblance in the dialogue, for Miss Burnett's characters, particularly in their pompous moments, speak with an elegance not of this century; but there is also, at the core of both writers' work, a hard, a rare wit. Miss Austen's genius, it is true, led her into softer and more delectable fields than any explored by Miss Burnett; but the resemblance remains, and it is one which even the most fanatical Janeites would hardly deny.

"Daughters and Sons" is concerned with the fortunes of the Ponsonby family, presumably around 1900. The Ponsonbys live in the depth of the English country, and theirs is a house from which governesses are forced to flee and children to gaze, as prisoners gaze from behind their bars. It is a matriarchal house; a grandmother and an aunt rule it with little mercy and less intelligence. Mr. Ponsonby, a popular novelist whose public is diminishing, has not seen fit to as-

sert himself. The elder children say exactly what they think, but always as though they are frightened, which they are. A nightmare house: but Miss Burnett, who never exceeds probability, refuses to let the nightmare run away with her, and that makes it more effective.

Then, upon the arrival of a new governess, the pleasantness of whose disposition is only surpassed by the strength of her will, there begins that perhaps most profound of domestic tragedies, the breaking of the matriarchy. The novel rises to a peak of melodrama (for the governess agrees to marry Mr. Ponsonby and the thwarted Aunt Hetty pretends to drown herself); and in the subsequent denouement everybody's character and fate is subjected to a light which, though too sudden, is inimitably clear.

"Original and uncompromising" seems, at this moment of writing, a fair description of Miss Burnett's work. The two qualities are mingled both in her method and in her approach. Her method is to confine herself to conversation, and conversation, moreover, which is with only two exceptions (you will find one "quavered" and one "whispered" in the novel) introduced by the not exactly ingratiating verb "said." The book is almost entirely deprived of gesture; when a character turns his or her back, raises a hand, walks to a window, drops a coffee pot, it is as though the heavens had uttered their voice. Things may happen off-stage—a journey to London, an immodest proposal from the vicar, Aunt Hetty's night in the field—but on the stage itself there is for the most part of the novel little or no action. And when Miss Burnett is at last forced to make some concession to plot, she does so at the risk of becoming hurried and melodramatic; and the whole thing is only kept to heel by the force of a singularly clear intelligence. And yet you cannot stop reading.

That is, you cannot stop reading if you are willing to accept her approach to life. She will not compromise with the reader. Hers is a world where all the females (except one) are strong, and where all the males (except one) are weak or incompetent. If you don't like this world, there is nothing for it but to put the book down. It would be a pity to do so, for here, surely, is essential literature. These are characters and predicaments which might have been produced by any novelist in any country. Miss Burnett gives them a production which, if severely limited, is inimitably English. But where the present English novel tends towards sentimentality and complacency, she is tart; where it indulges in vagueness, she is mercilessly clear; and to its current disillusion she opposes a complete detachment. I don't think that "genius" is a word to be thrown around, but I am sure that she has some of it; and I am quite sure that "Daughters and Sons" deserves to be called a masterpiece.

## Mountain Poet

*BEYOND DARK HILLS.* By Jesse Stuart. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$3.50.

**B**EFORE ever he published any of his stout, earth-imagined poems or any of his stories of his people of W-Hollow in Greenup County, Kentucky, close to the borders of West Virginia and Ohio, Jesse Stuart had written this story of himself for Dr. Edwin Mims at Vanderbilt University. Here as revised and amended it is clearly worth the professor's statement that in forty years of teaching he had never read anything so crudely written "yet beautiful, tremendous and powerful as that term paper you have written."

The crudeness is still apparent here but



DRAWING BY ISHMAEL  
From "Beyond Dark Hills."

in Jesse Stuart's story of mountain folk and steel mill toughs and the goodness and the hypocrisy of schools, it seems almost a crudeness designed in art to show the young ruggedness of such a poet as could halt from the tending of mules in a steep mountain field to write a sonnet with a stick on a big poplar leaf. Jesse Stuart's was a crude world, tough as old Mitch Stuart, his Grandpa, who was a mighty worker but a mighty drinker and fighter too. It is a crudeness of the earth and of life lived close to it, joying in it: "Be envious of the snake because it rubs the soil closer than you." But here, as in his short stories, there is beyond crudeness a certain preoccupation with horror as well as beauty, with funerals and violent death and decay, with such ghastliness as carrion-eating dogs, as a story of unfed hogs tearing the flesh of a mother and her first born. Here is almost a reveling in death, a gusto in the report of country sin, in hard poverty, in violent religion, and in loud and violent play. But here, too, is as tender a portrait of a mother as is anywhere in our language.

And though Stuart when he wrote his own story was either silent or more inexperienced in affairs, or bouts, of love than most of those he wrote about, his brief report of a childish passage in tenderness with pretty Maria Sheen is as graceful and complete as young love or the report of it should be.

So much beauty and horror decorate a very practical report of a poet's material success. There is a fire in Stuart which drove him down from the mountains to the amazing Lincoln Memorial College in Tennessee, which he describes, to Vanderbilt, to the production, almost mass production, of singing, sinewy, and veracious verse. But the poet is not all: the mountain man on a steep, rocky farm remains still a trifle amazed that a poem he made should bring a price equal to the value of three hundred and fifty-seven hen eggs with one egg left over. But if this is a success story it is a queer, lovely, unconventional one, and at its end, happily, country boy has not gone to town and made good; he is instead still in the country, aware of man and creature and plant and changing season and the eternal savor of a hard but stirring earth.

## Small World

*SWISS SONATA.* By Gwethalyn Graham. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by KATHARINE SIMONDS

**M**ISS GRAHAM'S novel is set in pure, high Lausanne, in the still purer and higher atmosphere of a girls' finishing school. The Swiss seem to defend themselves against the exaggerated romanticism of their scenery by creating for themselves exteriors of equally exaggerated propriety and dullness; but the foreign young girls who play the parts in "Swiss Sonata" are uninfluenced by the bourgeois calm of the natives. Washed up from various countries on this remote shore, some by parental neglect, some by political upheavals, each of these children struggled with her particular tragedy; to all alike Vicky Morrison, of whom no one knows anything, offers an inexplicable sense of security.

Miss Graham's picture of Lausanne and of the school, her statement of each girl's character and her demonstration of how it is influenced by what has been done to her, are deft and delightful. She has a very special knack of characterization and of dialogue, though some of the more philosophic discussions tend to be tedious. She maintains very well the impression of crescendo in these dramas; it is only when they are all resolved almost simultaneously that the reader feels a straining of the probabilities.

By turns touching and amusing, "Swiss Sonata" succeeds triumphantly in making a girls' school seem as rich and varied as the great living tormented world outside.