

## Author, Author!

*Christina Stead* ("The Man Who Loved Children") has one of the most trenchant and sceptical minds among modern novelists, but for some reason she is superstitious about the number 9. For example, she manages never to call on people whose address is 108, because the digits will add up to 9, nor will she visit people who live on 54th Street or 45th Street, for the same reason. Perhaps she has never realized that her publishers' offices are on the 9th floor of their building.

*George Palmer Putnam*, publisher and husband of the late *Amelia Earhart*, is writing his memoirs in his new mountain-top house in California. The house is named "Shangri-Putnam."

*P. G. Wodehouse* is now doing his writing in a padded cell. The humorist has not lost his mind—far from it. It happens that he is interned in Germany, along with some 1,000 other British civilians, in what used to be a lunatic asylum. For the past few months the Nazis have allowed him a small private room, formerly the padded retreat of violent lunatics, to work on his new novel. The author shares a long dormitory, fitted with double-decker bunks, with 60 other internees. Wodehouse novels from the camp library help the prisoners pass the time. (The Wodehouse stories, in the Tauschnitz editions familiar to all tourists,

used to be enormously popular in Germany—because they were thought to present accurate pictures of upper-class English life!) A number of English writers are planning to cooperate in sending Mr. Wodehouse a monthly letter. If the scheme works the authors will get some perhaps much-needed practice in condensation, because letters to internees are limited to one side of one page.

*Leo Prosser*, author of many radio scripts and brother of the famous *Monte Prosser* of *The Beachcomber*, pricked up his ears on a bus the other morning when the two ladies in front of him began discussing the ASCAP-BMI music war on the radio. "I don't care," one of them said, "what I really like is that good old Aztec music."

Reports came at the end of January of the safety of *E. Phillips Oppenheim*, who arrived in London after losing first his house in Guernsey and then his villa at Cannes; and *Norman Douglas*, who was reported missing on the Continent but got into Switzerland and finally to Portugal which he left for an unannounced destination.

*Archibald MacLeish*, poet, Librarian of Congress and this year's Honorary Chancellor of Union College, will head the United States delegation to the Inter-American Writers' Conference to be held at the University of Puerto Rico from April 14th to April 24th.

EUGENE ARMFIELD.

## Slavery Misnamed

*SHARECROPPERS ALL.* By *Arthur Raper* and *Ira De A. Reid*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1941. 281 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

THE sharecropper is emotionally a long way off in these days. Albania often seems a good deal closer than Arkansas. At such a time *Arthur Raper* and *Ira Reid* may lack the audience their book deserves for their insistence that in America today, all of us, North as well as South, in this democratic land are caught in a system which only exposes the sharecropper as the grisliest evidence of its tragedy.

In terms of the modern South, they have written a very disturbing American book. Eight years after the beginning of the New Deal and two and a half years after the President called the country's attention to the South, these two native students of the region write in sympathy with the New Deal's good intentions and in agreement with Roosevelt's feeling in 1938 that the South was the first economic problem of the country. They would extend and improve most of his programs. The purpose of their book, indeed, is a plea for a new dynamic and intelligent dealing with a land exploited and a people coerced to extents unprofitable to all. But the feeling about the national administration's more abundant life plans which the book conveys is that expressed in it by a Negro farmer. "The New Deal? It's done been by here!"

—and left the condition of the lower masses, white and black, hardly improved in a region where 11,000,000 people still belong to families with cash incomes of less than \$250 a year.

A good many things in "Sharecroppers All" are not pleasant to regard now when we have other things on our hearts. Some aspects of the pleasant, lullaby South are not stressed. There is more humanitarianism in the book than humor, though humor is not lacking nor the grim poetry of the great house crumbling on the old plantation above the ineffectual labors of little men. There is a sense of people in its statistics and of America in the tragedy which is the sum of them. The book is an honest American picture which deserves remembrance at a time when people talk eloquently in cities about democracy and its worth and meaning in the world. The sad thing is that this book is not Hitler's propaganda. This is home.

*Jonathan Daniels* is the author of "A Southerner Discovers the South."

## Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

Here's a new variety of a popular parlor game. Listed below are twenty questions that have been asked by twenty famous poets. You don't have to give the answers; just name the poets. Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 16.

1. What is so rare as a day in June?
2. O Wind, if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
3. Whither, midst falling dew . . . dost thou pursue thy solitary way?
4. Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
5. If I can rid your town of rats, will you give me a thousand guilders?
6. How do you like to go up in a swing, up in the air so blue?
7. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
8. What immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
9. O cuckoo! shall I call thee bird, or but a wandering voice?
10. Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
11. How doth the busy little bee improve each shining hour?
12. Have you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay that was built in such a logical way it ran a hundred years to a day?
13. Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
14. Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
15. Can storied urn or animated bust back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
16. When lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds too late that men betray, what charm can soothe her melancholy?
17. If she think not well of me, what care I how fair she be?
18. The night is chill, the forest bare; is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
19. What inn is this where for the night peculiar traveler comes?
20. Cats may have had their goose cooked by tobacco juice; still why deny its use thoughtfully taken?

# Middle-Age and John Ogilvie

*WEST TO NORTH.* By Compton Mackenzie. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1941. 404 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

THIS, the penultimate volume of "The Four Winds of Love," deals (as did its predecessor, "The West Wind of Love," of which it was originally a part) with the early post-war years: when heroes became ex-soldiers, and statesmen declined into politicians, and nations surrounded themselves with broken promises, like the bottle tops on a garden wall. It was a period of disintegration and some of the disintegration seems to have communicated itself to this book. This is hardly surprising, for the period 1918-1922 scarcely lends itself to story-telling. One catastrophe was over, others were beginning. The novel, like the times which it describes, is in a state of suspension. The various characters make beginnings but rarely arrive at definite conclusions.

Then, too, this is a novel about the approach of middle age, a period in life which both Mr. Mackenzie and his hero try to confront with dignity, but of which I think they secretly disapprove. Certainly, middle age does not become John Ogilvie; for he is a romantic, and there resides in his soul a gifted adolescent whom he has never quite outgrown. His devotion to lost causes, no longer enforced by the vivid impulse of his youth, seems a little foolish at times and at times a little pompous. Moreover, though he is by no means the "old school tie" kind of Public School man, one can detect in his thinking the undying influence of the Sixth Form. Only the fact that he is a widely read and a well informed man saves him from absurdity. And as the novel wanders, now in a desultory, now in a dynamic way through the post-war woes of Ireland and England and Italy and Greece, it is apparent that the other characters are suffering from the double effect of the times they live in and of John Ogilvie's approach to middle age.

And yet it is not the human beings who ultimately decide the fate of this work. The real hero of "The Four Winds of Love" is history. It is, no doubt, wrong to give history a teleological role; but it must be remembered that in Mr. Mackenzie's work history is not a dictator. It is merely a chronicler, with a vigorous narrative gift, and an intermittent desire to preach a sermon. In this novel, though it is caught in the sluggish aftermath of war, full of treacheries and disillusion, it shows an inexhaustible vitality.

And this can only be explained by the fact that Mr. Mackenzie has a marvellous memory and an impeccable ear. Though he has a wide acquaintance with politics, he is not a political, still less a philosophical novelist. History to him is a muse not a scientist. He deals in emotions and notions, rather than in ideas. But he has reconstructed the furniture and revived the very intonations of a period more antique than antiquity—the period just preceding our own. That is why it is no exaggeration to call these volumes an important work.



Compton Mackenzie

## Nazis on the Veldt

*THE DARK GODS.* By Sarah Gertrude Millin. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 296 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

SOUTH AFRICA has an able interpreter in Mrs. Millin. Not only does she know her country, its ambitious crust of Europeans and the vast agglomeration of its natives, much as a mother knows her children, but she has also the power and the art to create out of that knowledge novels that are remarkably terse and vivid. She is, first of all, a natural storyteller, one who needs neither melodrama nor sentimentality to lend color to a narrative. The bare bones of a story are enough. On them she can build triumphantly the kind of tale that goes straight to men's hearts. The subtle approach of a Conrad, the heightened sensitivity of a Proust, would be foreign to the directness of her method. This is not to imply that she is superficial. By the selection of telling detail, by deft concentration upon the ultimately significant, she goes deep into the sources of the spiritual unrest that lies at the root of African life. She understands, even as she deplores, the emotional turmoil that is there: the two European races, Boer and English, living together in apparent harmony but profoundly suspicious each of the other, and, beneath them, the ill-used natives, fixtures in the landscape, half-civilized, half primitive, incapable of adjusting themselves to new and badly devised standards, innocent, proud, unhappy, inarticulate.

Mrs. Millin has faced their problems before in many novels, notably in "God's Stepchildren," which, laid in the Africa of more than a century ago, touched the beginnings of the evils

that have continued to flourish. She has, however, never written more heroically, more cogently, than in this new novel which presents the Africa of today, with its old griefs unassuaged, with a new and insidious menace fanning the flames of ancient strife to a more destructive heat. The infiltration of Nazi agents in the guise of missionaries who bring with them a new god and a new cross, is the catalyst that precipitates new seethings. The dispossessed are always susceptible to promises; natives, in their innocence, are led into believing that Adolf Hitler is a god.

This is the story of the Bagamidri, an almost completely self-sufficient tribe that has its reserve on the borders of what was once German Southwest Africa. Its chief has died, leaving behind him many sons. The heir, the only son with a royal mother, is a child, and for many years his eldest brother has ruled as regent. Still another brother is a romantic idealist who, more educated than his kinsmen, dreams of a great African Empire for the Africans such as his imagination envisions in that of Prester John. The regent, as his royal brother approaches manhood, fears the loss of his position, and appeals to the tribal witch-doctor for a medicine that will continue his power.

It is a chronicle of failure, such moral failure as Hitler has come to rely upon in his enemies. It is not complete, however, even among the Bagamidri. Some among them have not lost their simple sense of those values which the sophisticated might do well to cultivate. But Mrs. Millin is not, except by implication, a moralist. She is a novelist whose characters are the blood, toil, tears, and sweat of the veldt.

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