

unmarred by comedy treatment, Mr. Hope emerges as a man of compassion and understanding. It takes a Dachau or a hospitalized vet to make him play straight man. But as a good straight man, he adds stature to the clown.

"So This Is Peace" is actually a sequel to "I Never Left Home." Mr. Hope makes a concession to his title

by devoting the early portion of his book to the post-war world, but drops it with relief to pick up the trail of his wartime travels. This book includes his Pacific swing and his last European tour for the USO prior to V-J Day. It is generously illustrated with amusing sketches by Lew Glanzman.

Ivory Village

SMALL TOWN. By Granville Hicks. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1946. 276 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT S. LYND

THIS book derives from a general conviction that I respect deeply. Mr. Hicks believes that democracy is worth making an effort for; that the people in all the little communities at the grass roots must be intimately and continuously involved in that effort; that intelligence must both identify itself closely with those people and their problems and also lead them—although "certainly the position of the intellectual today is a dubious and unhappy one"; and that one way to begin is for "intellectuals" to discover "the people" by going to live among them. His book is, accordingly, more than simply the latest version of "city-intellectual-returns-to - village - and - discovers - fellow - human-beings."

The dozen chapters fall into three sections: (1) The story of the author's development as an intellectual, including Harvard, college teaching, and in the 1930's his joining and later leaving the Communist Party. (It is too bad that this last double act of honesty and courage should leave such a stain in our middle-class society that Mr. Hicks must be forever anxiously trying to explain and repudiate this part of himself.) (2) Several chapters analyzing the New York State town of 800 people where he has lived and in whose life he has learned to participate increasingly since 1932. The two of these chapters dealing with the ways of thought and with salient aspects of human nature in the town are especially worth reading. (3) A less successful final bloc of chapters on the difficult problem of the relation of grass-roots communities to the planning of the larger society.

There is a warmth and perceptiveness about Mr. Hicks's approach to his neighbors that makes the book fascinating in its detail: the discussion of the role of conversation in the small town; the pervasive tendency of these small-town folk to avoid confronting issues squarely; the hanging back in public that makes "I'm not sticking my neck out" the un-

conscious motto of the town; the intense suspiciousness of motives, "which may in part serve as a defensive rationalization of inaction"; the endless enforced accommodations in the intensely personalized naked exposure of people to each other and to all of each other in the small town with its "mysterious grudges and unspoken grievances"; the difference between the intellectual's and the villager's mental processes.

Yet, despite this wealth of detail, the book fails in its over-all impact. Such an essentially personal document necessarily reflects both the strengths and the weaknesses of its author. Mr. Hicks is an ardent person—a valuable trait in the generally blurred "cageyness" of American life. But Mr. Hicks's kind of ardor tends to make him a black-and-whiter. A decade ago, as a new convert to the Communist Party, he almost outdid the Party in his denunciations of the craven souls who remained outside its ranks; then, later, after he resigned from the Party, everybody remaining in that organization as well as everything in the Soviet Union was in turn denounced by him. Now he plumps for the small town. And it is a good thing to be "for," in view of the decay of local vitality in mass society.

But let's get the record straight.



—George Cole.

Granville Hicks: "The position of the intellectual today is a dubious, unhappy one."

One cannot put on and off ideologies as though they were topcoats. Mr. Hicks points out shortcomings in his socialist beliefs in the 1920's, but he does not challenge the central fact of the unremitting growth of private economic power. The young Granville Hicks, to whose views the middle-aged Mr. Hicks is now rather condescending, would have noted that the structure of power in American life makes it increasingly Utopian to expect the reconquest of the nation for democracy from the grass roots up, against the spreading massed controls from the top down of monopoly capitalism. Certainly Mr. Hicks gives us little ground for hope of this democratic victory in his discussion of education and of civic irresponsibility in this book about the small town he knows best. And yet, stated with many qualifications, it is something like this dream that Mr. Hicks here offers us. He quotes in support of his thesis the Lilienthal emphasis on decentralized administration, yet he goes on to note that the common people of the Tennessee Valley do not seem to feel that what is going on there is their own. He failed entirely on his trip to the TVA to see that the "grass roots policy" of the TVA involves collaboration primarily with *organizations* within the going power structure.

Mr. Hicks is right in recognizing the potential power in the little people of America; but it is sheer moonshine to expect them to find and to exercise this power to build more democracy within the present coercions of monopoly capitalism. Standing in the wreckage of the "small-town decay," as he calls it and which he describes so well, Mr. Hicks disclaims any "desire to do away with capitalism"; he wants simply "to prevent our economic system from collapsing," and he sees the job as "simply to compensate for the inadequacies of free enterprise."

I like the fact that Mr. Hicks takes himself self-consciously as an intellectual. I sympathize, too, with his life-long quest to "belong." Quite a few of us would like to do that. But may it be precisely part of the unavoidable burden of the contemporary intellectual to recognize that there is no comfortable belonging for him within the kind of institutional system that is the United States today? And that the effort to belong as an optimistic all-out collaborator within that system, or any small part of it like Mr. Hicks's little town, inevitably exacts the price Mr. Hicks seems to have paid: one's grateful preoccupation with belonging on one's narrow personal sector blots out awareness of and interest in the larger strategy of the total battle?

Something Rich and Strange

CROSS SECTION. 1947. Edited by Edwin Seaver. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1947. 510 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

FOR the third time Edwin Seaver has brought out his yearly collection of hitherto unpublished novelettes, short stories, and fragments of novels to be published this year. Flavored with a touch of poetry, the book is a cross-section of the work of over fifty new American writers, though a few of their names are already familiar to the readers of our best fiction. It is also a cross-section of the ideas and the tensions that are evident in American life today, and a promise of a future more creative in literature than has been apparent for the last year or two. It is an ambitious project, for Mr. Seaver has distilled his collection from over seven thousand manuscripts.

Certainly, it is a more encouraging volume for the critic to survey than several of the collections of short stories that have appeared recently. These writers are not imitative; there is little or no trace of the effective and obsessive mannerisms of older novelists like Hemingway and Steinbeck whose mastery of the terse, hard phrase led a decade of young writers by the nose. Nor are they imitative of ideas or of ways of approaching a theme. There are three stories, for example, which distill brutality and death, Wayne Ellson's "Water Front," Meridel Le Sueur's "O Prairie Girl, Be Lonely," and James Cox's "Home-sick for a Hanging," where the scenes range from a cargo boat in New York harbor, a car fleeing from a bank robbery in Ohio to the shack of a Southern cracker. The emotional impact changes from savagery to bleak despair and to the strange mingling of cold-blooded murder and tender love revealed in Miss Le Sueur's memorable and tragic narrative.

Many of the stories in the collection

have what used to be called, "social significance." Ann Petry's "In Darkness and Confusion" recites the catastrophe that overwhelms an elderly Negro when his daughter becomes a small-time prostitute and his fat and wholesome wife dies of the impact on a weak heart of racial anger and violence during a riot in Harlem. This story is one of the high points in the book, for Miss Petry manages not only to create of the humblest of men a nobly tragic figure, but also to dramatize the sultry and dark surge of group anger and mob violence. Her tale bears a frightening message.

"The Way Things Are," Sam Elkin's tale of the discovery by a returned soldier of moral values new to him, belongs to this group of stories with a message as does the apocalyptic vision of the ghosts of the victims of the Nazis risen to terrifying life in "Tales from a Vienna Wood," which has been taken from the forthcoming autobiography of Hilde Abel. This fragment from a book is complete in itself, while the two chapters from Leonard Ehrlich's second novel seem unsatisfying, for the selection appears to be both too long and not long enough. There are other stories which are without any other significance than good writing and sound material can offer; they are sufficient in themselves, like William March's robust and entertaining "Ballet of the Bowie Knives," a fine example of bawdy humor which deftly avoids the four-letter word. Betty Bauer's "Confetti Night" is a gay love story in which the bedeviled and unprepossessing daughter of a woman professor manages to get amusingly tight at a youthful party on the floor below and at the same time cheerfully rids herself of her virginity. In "The Lord's Day," by J. F. Powers, a group of sad and aging nuns are shown humbly submitting to the bullying of a mean-hearted priest. In a few pages Mr. Powers gives individuality and dig-

nity to the sisters and conveys the surface barrenness of their lives.

None of these stories resembles the familiar episodic and plotless anecdotes so common to the "little" magazines. Mr. Seaver has found young and new writers who have learned how to create a complete and rounded story that has both a satisfactory beginning and an end. If this is a sign that the hold that fragmentary and fleeting moods, as substitutes for full-bodied stories, have had on young writers is waning, then the art of the short story will gain immeasurably and a young man or woman can hope to enter the magazines that have large circulations and thus escape from the prison of poverty and neglect. It is time for the death of that strange conception that stories with a beginning and an end are somehow unworthy of talented writers, or that the appearance of a story in one of the women's magazines or in the great weeklies marks a writer as a slave to commercialism.

Nevertheless, Mr. Seaver is right in his soundly written preface in viewing with alarm the success and sudden wealth of what he calls "the smart boys in the smart money, the cake and penny writers who want their compromise and their integrity too," the boys, and the girls, too, "who know the value of everything and the price of nothing." He believes that sensationalism and venality, with publishers hoping to make a killing and authors with one eye on the movies and another on the book clubs, are the order of the day. Mr. Seaver mentions Somerset Maugham's sleazy historical novel about Machiavelli as an example of a writer of the first rank who has fallen for the rewards of what he names "servant-girl fiction." As an example of blatant cynicism he excoriates Frederic Wakeman's "The Hucksters," in which the hero's only virtue is that he appears to have a conscience and sincerity about business, though when he falls in love with a woman he is, as far as his emotions go, as shallow as a dishpan. However, there have always been writers and publishers who want to make pots of money fast; and if there is less honesty today about the business of creating artificial tales that become best sellers, it is because the rewards for hitting the jackpot are immeasurably greater than ever before. It is to be hoped that a great many people will read "Cross Section 1947." It is a rewarding book in which you will meet four-square and sometimes tragic men and women and in which there is some hope for a resurrection of American literature out of the dismal swamp in which it seems to have fallen.



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