Frances Parkinson Keyes still in the Louisiana rice territory that was the setting of her previous novel. This time the period is the Twenties, and young Prosper Villac, a local rice mogul is enamored of nubile Victorine LaBranche, who has recently returned to the town of Crowley wtih her aged papa. But when Titine Dargereux, accordioniste in the Crowley honky-tonk, is found head first in one of Prosper's rice bins, it looks a though the bans may be off. All ends well, however, including the sagging rice game. The happy couple embark on a trip round the world ("It's been simply grand," writes Victorine) and a Rice Carnival joins love and agriculture in a suitable finale.

MELEE IN MALAYA: The angry Frenchman of "The Bridge Over the River Kwai" has this time turned to derision in examining the conflicts and cooperations of East and West in a state of apparent peace instead of war. As it is often the case in the contemporary novel, the writing is the overflow of a lived experience, and the perspective of Pierre Boulle in **"The Other Side of the Coin"** (translated by Richard Howard; Vanguard, $3.50), as in his previous work, bears the mark of authenticity. However, in this case the realism is one-dimensional. The cosmopolitan setting of a Malayan rubber plantation, the business operations of the Europeans, paralleled with the undercover terrorist machinations of the Asiatic Reds, the poor but picturesque villages in the background, are all vividly depicted. But the principal characters lack the complexity and uncertainties of real human beings. In their singleness of purpose they caricature the obsessions of the modern world, and though we are allowed to eavesdrop on their thinking, their ultimate fate appears as absurd as if their confidences had never been shared.

Within an implausible triangle is thrust Bernard Delavigne, the prosperous but cynical French manager, whose attitude toward the natives is somewhat less categorical than that of his English colleague who can state with full conviction: "The miracle . . . that in our time it is precisely the nations in power who are perfect from every point of view." Adhering to the old French cliché of the missionary-American, the author identifies Patricia, the wife, with the humanitarian side of Western civilization. She preaches that there is nothing more sterile than hatred. In dusting off old prejudices, her affectionate and wealthy hands transform the captured Communist, Ling, from waif to glamour girl.

The confrontation of these three broadly diverse prototypes produces sardonic results: Ling will bite the hand that fed her, and Bernard will react like a cad. For the devastating pessimism of Pierre Boulle equates the two faces of the coin as he attempts to demonstrate that while the revolutionaries of the East are unredeemably depraved, the Europeans are without backbone, and their associates, the Americans, are simple-minded. The cleverly satirical situations, the Gallic irreverence of Bernard, will remind many of Voltaire's "Candide," with the naïve American playing a female Pangloss in her trust in the ultimate good of human nature. But with all his gift of mockery Voltaire managed to find enough that was worth while in the world to reconcile us with its imperfections. Pierre Boulle chooses to leave us nothing—except perhaps the laughter of the gods.

—ANNA BALAKIAN.

COFFEE BEANS AND CHAOS: Revolutionary political situations which take their direction and dynamism from the pressures of the Cold War are apt to be misrepresented in the press for propagandistic reasons. Hence they afford a novelist with the reportorial skills that Norman Lewis possesses the rewarding opportunity of completing or correcting the record under the guise of fiction.

His novel, **"The Volcanoes Above Us"** (Pantheon, $3.75), represents the chaos produced by the Guatemalan revolution of a few years ago when the land reforms of the ousted regime were reversed and United States commercial interests were given an overwhelming authority. The story of how an efficient American corporation man attempts to mold the dispossessed Indian labor force into a "happy family of efficiently producing, cash-spending consumers, entitled to the same kind of rewards our civilization offers as we ourselves expect" has some of the force of a Swiftian satire. The Indians, naturally enough, respond to his efforts by going collectively insane and "dying on" their benefactor. This macabre form of passive resistance and the portrait of Kranz, the idealistic ex-Nazi nostalgic for the days when Hitler made it "good to be alive," are the best things in the novel.

The narrator, David Williams, is represented as taking part in the revolution because he hopes to regain the coffee plantation turned over to the Indians in the land reforms. But Williams displays an incredible lack of interest in his property, his woman, his past, his future—in fact in everything but "getting the story" as a good reporter should. He is, one feels, a fairly thin, dull mask for the author, and the absence of a passionate and involved character at the heart of the political turmoil frustrates the intent to make a true novel of vivid and significant material.

—R. V. CASSILL.

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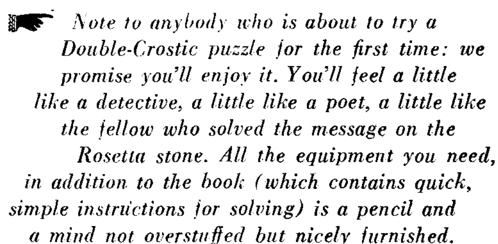

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