

NEW STATESMAN AND NATION 3 NOVEMBER 1956

Lives for Sale

Time Out of Mind. By Joan Grant. *Barker*, 16s.

Mr. Norris and I. By Gerald Hamilton. *Wingate*. 15s.

Twenty years ago Mrs. Grant found sudden fame with her book *Winged Pharaoh*, which described with great clarity and violence what it felt like to be an Egyptian princess of the First Dynasty. It was, Mrs. Grant explained, a first-hand account, dictated in a trance-like state induced by the proximity of a green scarab found in a friend's attic. The reader who mistrusts such goings-on will not be encouraged by the jacket of Mrs. Grant's autobiography, which shows her gazing broodingly through the top half of an egg-timer. As it happens, the book is as rare and rich, as the best kind of Christmas pudding, and filled with all sorts of unexpected rewards. Mrs. Grant has a sense of the ridiculous which must be unusual among witches. When she describes her first attempt at an exorcism—a failure, perhaps because of the substitution of spring onions for garlic in her Pentacle—she invokes laughter and shudders in just the right proportions, and her description of the social embarrassments caused by necromancy is the best thing of its kind since *Tobermory*.

Like Mrs. Grant, Mr. Hamilton once met Aleister Crowley, but if he ever dabbled in black magic he is too discreet to tell us so. The ectoplasm of which he is composed must have once, one feels, inhabited some seventeenth-century diplomatic corps; he is urbane, deceptively garrulous, and full of sinister little hints. Mr. Christopher Isherwood in a preface and Mr. Maurice Richardson in a tail-piece give us an inkling of his odd magnetism and the paradoxes which enabled him to serve as part-model, not only for the Mr. Norris who changed trains, but also for the Guildhall statue of Sir Winston Churchill. In spite of these and other piquant facts, however, the character of Mr. Hamilton remains tantalisingly nebulous.