

THE BIRMINGHAM POST
BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND
27 NOVEMBER 1956
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LEGENDARY FIGURES

Mr. Norris and I. By Gerald Hamilton. (Wingate. 15s.)

As every gossip knows, other people's lives are more interesting than our own. An undergraduate is dreaming of a jazz-session in New Orleans, while a saxophonist in that romantic city yearns for Oxford. Nothing could shake the conviction of George Orwell, educated at Eton, that the living-room of a miner was a very fascinating place: in that living-room sat the miner's wife, absorbed in the latest news from Buckingham Palace, her schoolboy son dreaming of the Famous Five of the Remove.

The one thing common to all these and similar day-dreams is that the life so imagined shall be at the opposite extreme from the life of every day. A principle of this kind must be applied by publishers before they accept autobiographical material. The lives recorded must be unusual in some way, the public aimed at being not primarily those people who are leading similar lives, but those to whom such lives are unattainable.

[. . .]

The successor of "Bloomsbury" in literary esteems was the group of Marxists led by Auden and Isherwood. Ironically enough, the book which made Mr. Isherwood famous was that very un-Marxist novel, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. The legendary original of the hero has now given us his autobiography, suitably entitled *Mr. Norris and I*. Mr. Hamilton's real life is far stranger than any fictional version of it. Changing trains indeed! At Hamilton Junction we can meet such varied figures as Guy Burgess and the Czar of Russia, Roger Casement and Aleister Crowley, E. H. Auden and Sir Oswald Mosley. There are few Royal Courts in the world, and fewer prisons where Mr. Hamilton has not at one time or another been a guest. He has the paradoxical distinction of having served in Brixton in both World Wars and to have been chosen as the model for Sir Winston Churchill's Guildhall statue. No publisher would allow a novelist to get away with so tall a story.