

sity, the difficulty, and the fruits of rebellion.

Eighteen-year-old Kate Black had married the slender widower Karl Alexander because he was good, because he was kind, and because he was the first man who asked her. But Kate came to learn that there are deeps within a woman which simple goodness can never be adequate to plumb. Eventually she had to seek from the young fiddle-maker Peter Jansen, as he from her, the ecstasy and misery that existed for neither of them within the blank walls of their marriages. Yet Kate and Peter were responsible persons who had to recognize their marriages and families as realities from which they could not run away. Only Marya, sister of Karl's dead first wife and of Peter's own wife, came to suspect what existed between them and that Dessie was the child of Peter. What came of this relationship finally, the emptiness and the irony, is brilliantly and compassionately chronicled.

Kate's story is told on the occasion of her visit to her daughter's home during six hot July days of 1922, and the story proceeds in two dimensions, the six days of the present and whole lifetimes of the past, which is not the past at all but the urgent present. The opening pages are a little difficult, as difficult as Kate's absorption into the bloodstream of her daughter's family life, but as we begin to know Kate we are caught up in the spell of her story, not to be released until she sits at last in a railway coach by night, her granddaughter's sleeping head pillowed on her lap, remembering how evening follows morning, and morning evening—nothing ever ended that is not also a new beginning.

In the space available to me it is impossible to convey the whole richness of this novel, the sharply etched portraits of so many different people, the many avenues of entrance into universal experience. This is a major novel that with all its technical brilliance is honest, simple, and direct, and distinguished for its understanding, its justness, its intelligence, and its feeling.

Social Comedy & the Supernatural

DESCENT INTO HELL. By Charles Williams. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy. 1949. 248 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT HALSBAND

THIS is an intricate work of imagination. Although permeated with the mystic and the supernatural, it is actually a theological problem novel, a modern morality. Such a book demands artistry of the highest order, and the late Charles Williams, who combined interests in poetry, religion, and metaphysics, was particularly equipped to write it.

The mundane framework is simple enough. The theatrical amateurs of Battle Hill, a middle-class community near London, are beginning preparations for their yearly pageant. It is to be "A Pastoral," by Peter Stanhope, an eminent poet who lives in the Manor House. The various citizens of the Hill are drawn into it, and by the time it is produced several months later there has been enacted a pleasant English social comedy, delicately tinged with satire. On this level, that of simple realism, the story has two components: the stage play and the players off-stage. As in Virginia Woolf's "Between the Acts," the play provides a proscenium for the essential spiritual drama and yet adds its own platform of symbolic meaning.

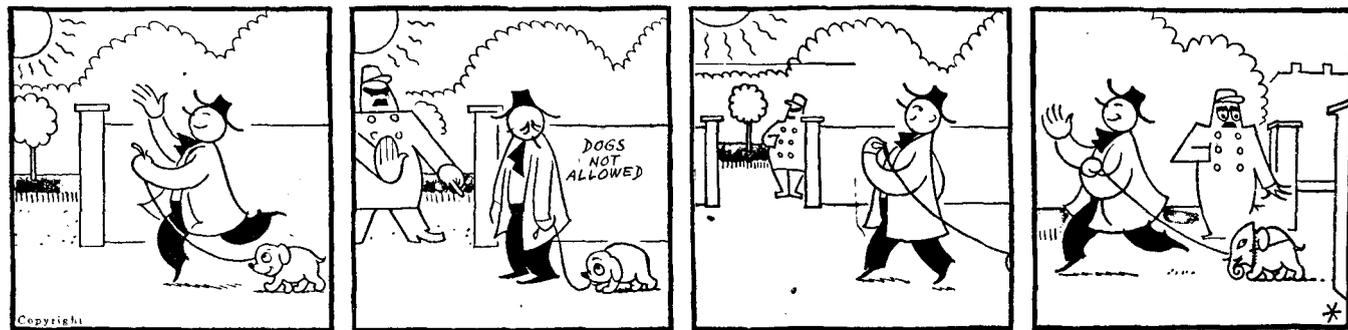
The production of "A Pastoral" also provides the pegs on which the mysticism is hung, so that the story actually pulsates between the brittle reality of English voices on hot summer afternoons and the misty depths of the supernatural. Here, beneath the material level, shade off the lives of the characters who exist also in sleep-dream and day-dream fantasies; and deeper still are those who have died on the Hill and whose spirits still haunt it. The paths of the living and of the dead transect on all levels, and the dividing lines between corporeality and spirituality and between present and past are erased. The common

meeting ground is the Hill, where in a bright unearthly twilight spirits and humans meet in fellowship. This unearthly, out of space and out of time, is beautifully described in a passage that ends: ". . . a single clock ticks or a single door opens in two worlds at once."

Pauline Anstruther, who plays the minor part of leader of the chorus in the pastoral, is the central character, though others are important, because she bears the evangelic burden. A sensitive, ingrown girl, she is frightened because she has been meeting on the road the image of herself, her *doppelgänger*. "The whole world was for her a canvas printed with unreal figures, a curtain apt to roll up at any moment on one real figure." Peter Stanhope rescues her from her hallucination by uncovering the childhood guilt that gave birth to it and by taking it on himself—like a parcel, as he says. This taking on himself of her guilt—its connection with psychoanalysis is obvious—is a link in a chain reaction, for Pauline takes on herself the burden of an ancestor who achieves salvation and martyrdom—in the sixteenth century! She also earns her own salvation by directing to the highroad a poor laborer who had escaped the misery of his life by hanging himself on the Hill, and who as a spirit had been wandering between two worlds until she goes out to meet him.

There are others, too, who are guests in alien worlds. Lily Sammille (Lillith), foiled in her wickedness, is last seen in a setting of apocalyptic magnificence, beneath the graveyard, surrounded in the gold-specked darkness by her victims, inhabitants of the cities of the plain. The piteous Wentworth is the sinner whose agony is ended by a descent into hell, when we see him at the end of the novel as he is "drawn, steadily, everlastingly, inward and down through the bottomless circles of the void."

It is curious, actually, that although
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"Of all animals!"

—Piet Hein.

Americana. *Abysmal* was the word to describe the ignorance of the average American about his own continent three decades ago. Since then, thanks to the automobile, as well as the patriotic surge and the movements of population that attended World War II, the depth of that ignorance has shrunk considerably. Two of the books reviewed below deal with a section of North America still hard to reach and still little known. An adventurous couple, Constance and Harmon Helmericks, report their unconventional experiences among the Eskimos in "Our Alaskan Winter." Leslie Roberts has used extensive library research and three look-sees to spin the saga of that great northwestern Canadian river "The Mackenzie." . . . Other notable books of the week include Fletcher Pratt's profiles of "Eleven Generals" and Vera Bloom's guide to what is *comme il faut* in Washington's social circles—"The Entertaining Lady."

War Chiefs from 1775-1945

ELEVEN GENERALS. By Fletcher Pratt. New York: William Sloane Assoc. 1949. 355 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by LLOYD LEWIS

HAVING decided to make a book of some articles written by himself about various American generals, Fletcher Pratt concocts a preface in which he tries to establish a common denominator between them. Since their similarity turns out to be little more than that they were all successful battle commanders, were aggressive, relied on fire power, and had a touch of amateurishness about them, the introduction is unnecessary.

Each article stands alone, sharp, clearly drawn, written with a vivid swiftness which is always sagaciously kept from running away into the open road of pure narrative. Mr. Pratt can combine criticism and story-telling as few modern students of the military art can hope to do.

With the exception of Sheridan, whom he sketches most brilliantly of all, and Omar Bradley, whom he apparently understands the least of all his eleven men, Mr. Pratt's subjects are not the Washingtons, Lees, Jacksons, Grants, Shermans, Eisenhowers, and MacArthurs. Instead they are Nathaniel Greene and Mad Anthony Wayne from the Revolution, Jacob Brown and Richard M. Johnson from the War of 1812, John Buford, George H. Thomas, and James H. Wilson from the Civil War, Charles P. Summerall of World War I, and A. A. Vandergrift of World War II.

His sketch of General Sheridan is not only the most vividly written but the most imaginatively penetrating summation, short or long, ever done on the man whom Grant repeatedly ranked with Frederick the Great. From his own studies of the military

art, Mr. Pratt concludes, "The limits of Sheridan's talents were never reached; perhaps there were none."

Sheridan's greatness was his versatility. Nobody could beat him at securing information about the enemy before he struck, yet he could change plan instantly on the battlefield, and was incredibly flexible, being alternately dogged, cold, cautious, inventive, surprising. He concealed from the enemy what the enemy wanted to know; he revolutionized the organization, the morale, the use of cavalry; he broke the legend of the South's invincibility in the horse arm.

Nathaniel Greene produced something new in warfare, the strategic use of irregular troops. Wayne, famous

for storming Stony Point, was greater fighting Indians. He upset the Red Devils completely with his use of Roman squares and other devices he found in the literary works of another frontier fighter, Julius Caesar. Jacob Brown, whom Mr. Pratt, in some excitement, calls "the best battle captain in the history of the nation," got prodigious work out of otherwise faltering militiamen and was the real victor in battles from which Winfield Scott emerged as the popular hero. Richard M. Johnson may or may not have killed the fabulous Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames, but Mr. Pratt thinks he certainly invented the idea of harrying the Indians in their villages with mounted riflemen and of keeping them off balance in battle by sending in waves of horsemen to dismount and fight as infantry—the latter device evolving eventually into Sheridan's master-technique.

Between Johnson and Sheridan, came John Buford, the Union cavalry chieftain who died of pneumonia in 1863 but not before he had demonstrated that, as Mr. Pratt puts it, "the horse was as antiquated on the battlefield as the elephant." Buford taught horsemen to leave their animals when contact with the Confederates was made, and shoot from cover till heavy forces threatened, then into the saddle and away! George H. Thomas, "The Rock of Chickamauga," developed the counter-punch and at Nashville, Mr. Pratt says, "The Confederate Army collapsed like a kicked melon." Incidentally, it was not Thomas, as Mr. Pratt says, but his battery commander,



General Sheridan at the Battle of Five Oaks, April 1, 1865—"The limits of Sheridan's talents were never reached; perhaps there were none."

—Culver Service.