

FICTION

(Continued from page 18)

death wish," a "symbol of peace" against warring society, yet wherever he roams there will be the two feminine spirits intertwined, never to be parted, reminding him guiltily not only of Vera and Volumnia's death struggle, but also of the promise of love they offered him in the twilight of his life.

Fiction Notes

THE WHITE KING, by Samuel B. Harrison. Doubleday. \$3. This is not, as the dust-jacket description would have you believe, the story of a man but of a nation. The islands of Hawaii, like the thirteen original colonies of America, fought a long and bitter struggle for independence and their ultimate success was no less an achievement than that of the signers of our own Declaration of Independence. Harassed by the chicanery of French, British, and American businessmen greedy for land, bullied and impoverished by the captains of foreign warships, at the mercy of epidemics and a centuries-old feudal system, divided between the preachings of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, the Islanders suffered every hardship and indignity the white man and nature could thrust upon them.

When Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, an American physician, left the States with his young bride and sailed to what was in 1827 called the Sandwich Islands, he scarcely dreamed he would one day renounce his U. S. citizenship, swear allegiance to young King Koli, and become, among other things, foreign minister of Hawaii, dubbed by his enemies "The White King."

In his eagerness to give a thorough account of this formative period in Hawaiian history Mr. Harrison has written a book that reads like a history text rather than a novel. He has, however, creditably dramatized the story of a people and a nation who deserve the respect and admiration of freedom-loving men and women everywhere. —JOSEPH M. GRANT.

THE BREAK-UP OF OUR CAMP AND OTHER STORIES, by Paul Goodman. New Directions. \$1.50. There is little doubt that Paul Goodman "has something," but the exact nature of this intangible something the author does not fully permit us to define. There is good writing here, and such potentialities as gain clarity only in patches, and now and again an arresting sentence which surely conveys the fact that we have here

a serious author who has something to say, if only he could organize the proper means for saying it. What he most needs is a proper theme, a proper structure, and a complete mastery over his materials.

As it is, the first and longest story, which gives title to his book, is irritatingly unsatisfactory. The break-up of the Jewish camp for boys and girls he describes here is not, for the most part, very interesting. Its one episode that stands out is the visit of the Canadian canoeist, who inspired the camp with a spirit lacking there previously, but who went off in the storm because of an unfriendly reception and was drowned. "His spirit, freed from the body but fixed by the longing that had governed him when alive, returned to haunt our camp," we are told. Now here is a motif which might hold the story together; without a proper use of it, the story remains something which consists of scattered impressions, indeed something that is not a story at all but a rambling reminiscence. More successful are two slight sketches, "A Prayer for Dew" and "The Joke," in which the author calls his characteristic humor into play. —JOHN COURNOS.

THE YEAR OF THE SPANIARD, by Henry Castor. Doubleday. \$3. Despite Mr. Castor's unusual material, rich with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, yesterday in Philadelphia, and his creative ability to turn such happy phrases as "they picked, fought, and settled a war during a summer vacation," it is difficult to regard "The Year of the Spaniard" as a novel. There is only a breathless attempt to make a few characters real: Susan Brecht, who works in the Frankford Arsenal; Warren Spangler, a newspaper reporter; Caleb Hawkins, a law student at the University of Pennsylvania; Tomás, the Cuban "sharp kid" who became Caleb's bodyservant, and Rowena Evers from Tampa. The rest of the people, little and great, are flung at the reader without benefit of introduction while the author, with all the good humor in the world, rattles through his catalogue of yesterday's customs and manners and events in a racy, slangy style not even the slang of 1898 but of 1950.

Despite the dreary effect on eye and mind of such concoctions as "goodnessknows," "odeareyes," "whyowhy," and "dearodear" he can turn many a sharp bright phrase. But 274 pages lacking in emotional tension are tough reading even if peppered with great names and bright remarks. Emotion lies behind all creative work and it is not clear to me just what emotional force directed Mr. Castor to decide, for instance, when to

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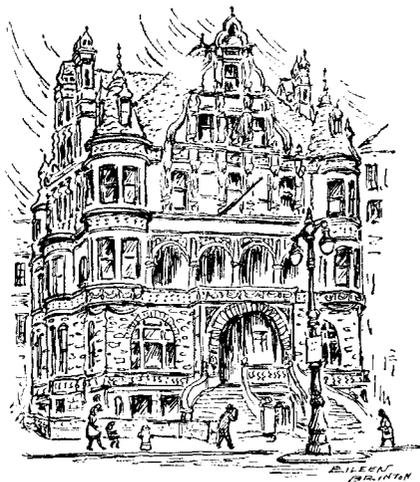
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end one section or chapter and when to begin another. The activities of Caleb and Warren in Philadelphia and in Cuba can scarcely be referred to as a plot. With the exception that Warren returns to marry Susan, and Caleb, wounded, falls into Rowena's experienced hands and they marry, a great many incidents, episodes, and even love scenes could be planted at random throughout the book.

I hoped for a rich experience in picking up a book based on a subject so infrequently chosen. Instead I was hounded on a cross-country race with no rewarding impressions of the ground covered.

—MARY FANNING WICKHAM.

RILEY DAWSON, by James Plimell Webb. Dodd, Mead. \$2.50. "It was broad day when I got home and Paw's two big dogs was laying by the door, so I knowed that he was there again. Paw and Maw was eating breakfast. If they was waiting for me, it was like one hungry hog waits for another, but that wasn't no matter because there was a plenty of vittles."

This is the sort of gentle irony and subtle humor that flows through the story of young Riley Dawson's life in the backwoods of Kentucky in the early 1880's. Through Riley's eyes we see the powerful figure of Paw Dawson fighting against establishment of the railroad and resenting the "furriners" from Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, who threaten to destroy his freedom by destroying the virgin forests. Riley's adventures with his friend, Ben Coleman, like those of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, are filled with excitement, suspense, and quiet laughter. Mr. Webb delightfully recreates the world and the pioneer people of the Kentucky mountain country and to glimpse their lives is very rewarding.

—J. M. G.

FINAL NIGHT, by Robert Gaines. Doubleday. \$2.75. This exciting story of Fleet Street by a Fleet Street journalist has a dual merit. It presents, in

the first place, a vivid picture of newspaper life, seen obviously from the inside. Only a single day is recorded but it happens to be a day packed with thrills which are at once a torment and a delight to the chronic newspaperman. In the second place, we have two parallel stories of violence, each in its way a suspense story, seemingly independent of the other yet actually interrelated, as such things inevitably are in fiction. Managing Editor Granger is anxious to have both stories for the evening edition. Redfern, a young reporter who has not yet grown cynical, is sent to cover the trial of Girda Thorp, charged with the murder of her husband. Black is his opposite; he is old, disillusioned, and discouraged. He realizes that in being sent to greet the arrival of Dr. Bruckmann, an unhappy diplomat fleeing secretly from the totalitarian dictators of his country, he has a chance of a scoop; it is rather important that he not fail in accomplishing something spectacular. He runs into more excitement and adventure than he has bargained for; while at his end young Redfern encounters surprise after surprise.

The most arresting character in the novel is Granger, whose loyalty to his paper in the face of personal tragedy and disillusioning aspects of human nature has something sterling about it. All in all, a very readable novel.

—J. C.

GIVE BEAUTY BACK, by Francis X. Connolly. Dutton. \$2.75. Mr. Connolly's aims here are perfectly clear. His novel of a fine artist who struggles through a career of worldliness, impulse, and ambition toward the receding horizon where peace and contentment must lie, is calculated to raise a great question and point a great moral. What is success and what is truth? How may earthly man find peace? Mr. Connolly presents his answer in Ransie Gilbey's discovery of the ultimate truth: that beauty is borrowed from God and must be given back to its Giver; that the artist, like any man, can find his greatness in serving God in his work. Gilbey ends his career in the peace of this understanding, painting his finest work, "The Stations of the Cross." Mr. Connolly's book is a simple statement of principle. If it lacks anything it is the proper illumination of principle by means of the powers available to the novelist. His characters are not large enough to support the theme for which they were created. In particular, Ransie Gilbey, the artist, gives us no sense of a creative man struggling to find the source of his powers; nor does his conversion at the end rise out of any truly realized spiritual crisis.

—N.L.R.

A LENS ON LIFE

(Continued from page 10)

portant writer will be recognizable not by new materials but by new insights, says V. S. Pritchett.

It is often necessary for a writer to distort the particulars of experience in order to see them better. As was remarked earlier, he can look upside down or squint or put on gauze spectacles or do what he chooses, so long as his method lets him see at least part of his world more clearly. To take only one example, the padded nightmare world of Franz Kafka represents a new insight. The solemnly logical course of the incredible begets a new satire and a new humor, and for all its strangeness Kafka's fiction reflects real men and real institutions better than many more representational kinds of fiction.

Whatever the method, it will involve a simplification. By inexorable necessity, all art simplifies. Hemingway, learning to write "beginning with the simplest things," stripping his vocabulary to the bare Anglo-Saxon, reducing his sentences to the simple declarative, eliminating all latinate complexity, and trying to eliminate even such customary "cheating" as metaphor, simplifying his people and simplifying his themes, peeling down even his favorite theme of death to its simplest and most violent forms, represents only one kind, an extreme kind, of artistic simplification. The world that results in Hemingway's fiction may not be a world we like, but it is unmistakably a world. Conrad's world, in its own way, is just as simplified. Often it is a world within one ship, its deck the whole earth and its crew all mankind, and the moral universe bending over the actions of his people as close or as remote as the stars at sea. Even Henry James, on the surface one of the most complex and hair-splitting and qualifying and entangled of fictionists, begins with absolutely sweeping simplifications. To clear the way for the unimpeded moral choices which form the crucial moments of all his stories, he first eliminates most of what some other novelists might build their whole books from. No James character ever has to worry about making a living; James endows them all with handy inheritances. No James character is fettered by family responsibilities or any of the complex nets that fasten about the feet of people in life. All of James's people are free to move at will through the world he has made for them, absolutely and deliberately set free from all mundane entanglements so that their moral choices can be "pure" and uninfluenced. And