

Alone with Gramps

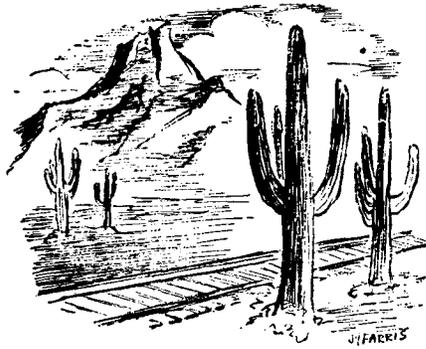
CAMPBELL'S KINGDOM. By Hammond Innes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 309 pp. \$3.50.

By FLETCHER PRATT

SUPPOSE your grandfather, a man you saw for the last time as he was emerging from a prison sentence you believed he deserved, left you all his property. This property, as part of the supposition, consists of a considerable territory in the Rocky Mountains, under which your grandfather believed oil to lie; but the best available oil geologists said no dice. The attorneys who notify you of the inheritance want you to sell the place because someone wishes to build a power dam near it, and they offer you a good round sum. It is probable you would take the good round sum and neglect your grandfather's letter bequeathing you his ideals as well as his land. But what if, on the day the attorneys call you in, you are notified you have only a few months to live?

Mr. Innes bets, and is agreed with from this corner, that you would go take a look at the inheritance if only to make the most of your declining weeks. Whereupon, and very naturally, you come upon some very strange shenanigans, assorted hatreds, conflicts, and personalities.

The result is an adventure story. Also it is a very interesting production, not only in the sense of keeping the reader out of bed, without too much inciting him to look at the last chapter and find out how it comes out. (The adventure story is different



from the straight detective novel in this respect: the terminus is by no means as important as the view from the windows while the train is going past.) It is also interesting as a straight matter of literature. The characters are not as completely built as in a "serious" novel, but they are a lot more fun to live with, even when they are on the wrong team. The dialogue really gets somewhere, the parts all hang together, motive arises out of character in a perfectly credible fashion. And since perfection of visual and tactile detail is required to make the reader accept the credibility of scenes and actions in which he can only vicariously have a part, perfection of detail is provided.

In other words, the claim being made from this corner is that the adventure story, when it comes as strong as this, is better literature than the pundits are willing to concede. It is true that no world-shaking problems are discussed. But it is at least arguable whether the discussion of such questions does not belong outside fiction, and whether fiction, in the person of Hammond Innes, is not returning to its primary business of telling a tale well.

Fiction Notes

THE QUIET LIFE OF MRS. GENERAL LANE. By Victoria Case. Doubleday. \$3.75. The convention in historical romances is to show the wife of the "great man" as a creature of dazzling beauty, infinite caprice, and a victim or heroine of countless illicit romances. Miss Case has chosen a more solid course. Her "great man" is Jo Lane, a legislator in the growing state of Indiana, a private, then general, then hero in the Mexican War, governor of the Oregon territory, a senator nationally honored at first, later execrated. Meanwhile there was Polly, as patient a Griselda as you'd be likely to find. Marrying Lane early, she bore him ten children, watched him go off to the wars and his high adventures, kept the home fires not only burning but supplied with fuel. Despite the title Miss Case demonstrates that this was by no means a quiet life but rather one full with problems, conflicts, tragedies. Mrs. General Lane emerges as a soundly interesting creation, whose factual story has been garnished with an absorbing interpretation. The general, if not quite cut down to size, has quite a little of the glory rubbed off.

PORTRAIT OF MELLIE. By Diana Petre. Pantheon. \$2.75. This is one of those tight, taut, and intense little studies in improbable psychological horror that recurrently appears on the literary scene. As usual it is so well done that you wonder why the author didn't find better employment for time and talents. Mellie is only one of the monsters in Miss Petre's waxworks, but she is a dilly. Warped in childhood by an overpossessive father (with the customary incestuous complications), Mellie remained an amoral egocentric whose ruthless pursuit of her own ends was only held in bounds by her childishness and ineptitude. When Miss Withy (second monster) gets hold of her and begins to manipulate her the nasty doings get under way. Mellie almost destroys her children. These had apparently been conceived by parthenogenesis for all the customary forms of sex behavior Miss Petre allows to enter her story. A third monster—who dies from taking an unaccustomed bath—succeeds in thwarting Mellie, and the novel floats away into the miasma from which the author cooked it up.

HELEN TEMPLETON'S DAUGHTER. By Louise Eskrigge Crump. Longmans, Green. \$3. For about two-thirds of its way this is a pleasantly readable, mildly thoughtful romance
(Continued on page 30)

August Night: Deep South

By Daniel Whitehead Hicky

The last red weary footstep of the sun
Presses the distance, leaving the cotton fields
To night and fireflies. Straggling shadows run
Along a broken fence where four o'clock yields
Small drifts of faint perfume before its petals
Close out the darkness, folding some inside;
A stretch of cabins' lights, their smoking kettles
Spicing the moonrise with a savory tide.

This is the crickets' hour; their music stitches
The seams of shadows together as the moon
Burns in watery patterns where stagnant ditches
Stir with a frog's leap and his throaty tune.
The cabins darken again and night takes over,
Sowing a stillness on the fields like death
As earth turns slowly as a restless lover,
Delirious with honeysuckle's breath.

The U.S.A. Next Monday is Labor Day, honored by long-standing custom as the time Presidential campaigns start in earnest. Three subjects that seem certain to be argued heatedly during the following nine frenzied weeks are debated a bit—just a bit—more coolly in books we review this week. Corruption in government? Professor George A. Graham discusses ethics in public life and offers some admirable if perhaps unattainable standards of conduct for servants of the people in “Morality in American Politics” (below). Communism in America? Former American Communist Louis F. Budenz confuses instead of clarifies this important issue in “The Cry Is Peace” (page 14). Our policy towards the USSR? Jerome S. Davis seems equally muddled in the plea he makes that we try to understand and get along with the Russians in “Peace, War, and You” (page 15). . . . The American penal system comes in for some severe and probably unjustified criticism in Fulton Oursler’s “The Reader’s Digest Murder Case” (page 15) and Fred Berson’s “After the Big House” (page 16).

Case of the Perforated Pockets

MORALITY IN AMERICAN POLITICS. By George A. Graham. New York: Random House. 338 pp. \$3.50.

By V. O. KEY, JR.

ALMOST everyone favors morality in politics; Professor Graham takes his stand with the majority on this principle. It is not so certain that the majority would stand with him as he spells out the ramifications of the abstract proposition. He has not sought to enthrall his readers with a narrative of the shenanigans of the knaves, both sinister and engaging, who flit through the shadows of American politics. Nor has he concerned himself with an analysis of the tricks, extraordinary in the ingenuity devoted to their contrivance, by which a more or less dishonest dollar can be turned.

Professor Graham takes a different, and broader, road. He argues that political authority rests on a moral base and that all “civilized men” recognize that certain moral imperatives must guide men in public life. For the politician the Decalogue is not enough. Instead of achieving a negative morality by simply not sinning, he must also be moved by “a positive good will” to act, according to his very best judgment, “in the interests of the universal neighborhood of mankind.”

From such a conception the conclusion flows, if I state correctly the

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architecture of the argument, that every legislative act, every governmental decision involves a moral choice, large or small. An act of Congress, adopted according to all the constitutional formalities, may be most immoral. A senator may be completely money honest yet a scoundrel of the darkest hue. Truly monumental rogueries that make the deep-freeze set look like a Sunday School class may be indictment-proof. At this point a part of the majority would probably desert Professor Graham. They would be reluctant to concede

that their policy demands might be immoral.

With so broad a definition of morality a complete report on morality in American politics would fill several books. Professor Graham has to limit himself to the high spots. He organizes his treatment around the chief institutions of politics: the legislature, the executive, the administrative agencies, the courts, political parties, and pressure groups. Congress gets a low score on all counts in the consideration of the question of why it has “failed so miserably to achieve the moral force and the moral leadership expected of it.” The unrepresentative character of legislative bodies is held partially to blame. In the Senate, for example, a small group, such as the silver bloc, can and does take advantage of its position to hold up the rest of the country. Seniority, senatorial courtesy, the filibuster, and other departures from responsible and rational action come in for attention. Here some more of the majority might desert Professor Graham on his specifics, for there are those who contend that even the filibuster, even rural overrepresentation in legislative bodies serve great moral purposes.

The great power of the President, it is argued, has been erected by Presidential assumption of the moral leadership that Congress rejected. The public expects the President to seek the public interest while Congress labors under the compulsion of no such expectation. Although due



RFC investigation scene—“policy demands might be immoral.”

—Acme.