

MISS DE LA ROCHE PULLS
THE STRINGS

The Atlantic Monthly Press's prize competition has yielded a novel that is really a prize. It is "Jalna," by Mazo de la Roche, an accomplished and aristocratic novel about bourgeois people.

The name of "Jalna," taken from a military post in India, was given to his pretentious home in Ontario by Captain Philip Whiteoak when he shed the British uniform and went to Canada to live on an inheritance. The grandiose hopes of the Whiteoaks faded in their ineffectual children, and it is with their grandchildren that we are concerned as the story opens. There's Renny Whiteoak, an immature patriarch, running the farm and governing his brood of brothers and sisters; Meg Whiteoak, filling her days with unforgiveness of an erring fiancé; Piers, efficient farmer and lover; Finch Whiteoak of the caddish conscience; Eden the thin-blooded poet; and little Wakefield Whiteoak, most lovable and spankable of children.

In an elaborate design, this generation of Whiteoaks is patterned through the book, with the frayed Uncle Nicholas and his Yorkshire terrier at one end, Uncle Ernest and his cat at the other, and Grandma Whiteoak, chewing a peppermint, smiling uncomfortably down at them all. And, since Miss de la Roche's highly developed sense of design leaves no unfinished pictures, Grandma has her malign Hindu-cursing parrot. So aptly and precisely does each of the protagonists, including the animals, bow and strut his stuff when Miss de la Roche pulls

the strings, that they might all be puppets. The remarkable thing is that these people, and their ambitions and quarrels and muddling loves, are real.

The stodgy walls of "Jalna" inclose a quite complete miniature world, though occasionally a newcomer is admitted, as when the fastidious Alayne Archer of New York, marries Eden.

It's the story of Alayne and Eden that provides the central motive of the complicated pattern. Alayne, brought to "Jalna" by her romantic young poet, fell in love with the matter-of-fact Renny, and he with her. The poetical Eden, in turn, found a wayward sister-in-law more attractive than his wife. "Jalna" rumbled with impolite drama, and all its long-smoldering volcanoes went off at once.

Craftsmanship of a high order animates every corner of this little world, and keeps the varied stories moving to their neat climax. But the author's finest achievement, I think, is in the portrait of that elusive, life-loving youngster, Wake Whiteoak, who is as much out of place in the solemn doings of his elders as a kitten at a state funeral. More than technique went into the drawing of Wake. Published by Little, Brown & Company.

FAR FROM THE CHESTNUTS
OF CLERMONT

At a time when biographies are generally being written like novels, Willa Cather comes along with a novel that's written like a very able biography. "Death Comes for the Archbishop" is the straight-away story of Jean Marie Latour, ap-

pointed by Rome as vicar apostolic of New Mexico, of his lifelong friendship with his assistant, Father Joseph Vaillant, and their deeds of methodical and plodding heroism for the glory of God.

In the year 1851, Father Latour started from Cincinnati to find his bishopric. About a year later, after a taste of every peril of the road, he reached it—only to find that his credentials hadn't been forwarded by the church official in old Mexico to whom they had been intrusted. So Father Latour mounted his horse and set out again, baptizing, marrying and saying mass on the way. His position assured at last, the bishop settled down to organize the fold of straggling Mexicans and Indians, while Father Joseph took on some of the cruder duties.

It was Father Joseph who cooked the noble onion soups that were the cure for a Frenchman's nostalgia, and cunningly imported the angelus bells. It was Father Joseph, too, who begged that inseparable pair of mules, Contento and Angelica. Riding his wretched old horse into the far-away ranch of Manuel Lujon, he pointed out ever so casually that one of the good mules would be the saving of his life on the long desert journey. The mule was proffered for the good of Manuel's soul. But no! Could he, a humble priest, accept this wonderful steed while the bishop himself rode a wind-broken hack in Santa Fé? Sadly he shook his head. . . . And so Angelica went with Contento across the desert, and the two mules did more than their share in the spreading of the faith.

There are bad priests as well as

good ones in Miss Cather's story—Father Martinez, who was half desperado and half Friar Tuck, and the acquisitive Father Lucero. Martinez was cuffing a boy when his bishop arrived at Taos and remarked casually: "He is my own son, Bishop, and it is time I taught him manners." Could the gentle bishop, thousands of miles from his source of power, combat such intrenched arrogance? The gentle bishop could, and how he did it, makes very good reading.

There were many meetings and partings between Bishop Vaillant and the beloved Father Joseph, until Contento and Angelica took the stout missionary West on his last trip. Then the bishop, his battles fought, dreamed of the chestnut trees of Clermont and waited for death. It's a mellow story, unhurried and full of serene power. Published by Alfred A. Knopf.

WILL, THE DARK LADY, AND W. H.

A Shaksperian scholar is often written of as some one lacking the juices of life, drowning poetry in sheaves of references and gloating over foot-notes. There is a satirical glimpse of one of these dry-as-dust Shaksperians in "Jalna." But scholarship that can really throw new light on the career and personality of Shakspeare is important, all the same—important because interesting.

"Shakspeare: Actor-Poet," by Clara Longworth de Chambrun, is a book that represents a prodigious amount of painstaking, luminously intelligent work. Madame de Chambrun shakes out the basket of known facts about Shakspeare's life, and exhibits them from every possible angle, but,