

Outlook Book Choice of the Month

Reviewed by Robert Cantwell

SHERMAN, FIGHTING PROPHET.

By Lloyd Lewis. \$3.00. 653 pp. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

A FEW MONTHS after the beginning of the Civil War a red-haired man of forty, a general in the Union Army, was relieved of his command and sent to his home for a rest. He was William Tecumseh Sherman, commander of the department of the Cumberland, foster-son of one of the leading lawyers of the North, a graduate of West Point, a former banker and teacher. Back in his home in Lancaster, Ohio, Sherman read in the newspapers that he had gone insane.

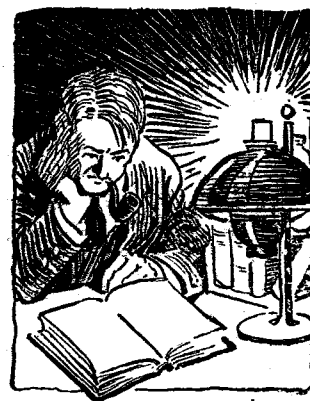
There was a curious sequence of events behind this story. For some time Sherman had been acting queerly, at least from the point of view of the newspapermen. He could not share the common view that the war was to be brief and decisive, and that the rebels were to be quickly defeated. He was a realist; he saw war as a serious and deadly business, with its object not glory but victory, with as little loss of life and property as possible. The stream of volunteers into his camps, far from cheering him, sickened him with despair. He had been in the rout at Bull Run, and the youth of his troops, their inexperience, the inadequacy of their supplies, affected him so greatly that he could not endure the responsibility of sending them into battle. His anxiety for his troops and his lack of confidence in them led him to make decisions which were inexplicable to observers. The same man who was later to lead one of the most daring marches in military history now trembled at every stray rumor from the enemy, and magnified the Confederate threat out of all proportion to the actual strength of the army.

At the same time, the newspaper correspondents were opposed to Sherman. He believed in a military censorship of the press. He expelled correspondents from his

camps, had them arrested when they tried to enter, and all this at a time when the newspapers were powerfully connected with army affairs. A little later he was to have the correspondent of the "New York Herald" court-martialed as a spy—an act which required almost as much courage as the march to the sea, since the "Herald" was the chief supporter of Lincoln's administration. The correspondents struck back and circulated the rumor that Sherman was crazy. There was no defense against it. The simple accusation was enough to destroy confidence in Sherman, and thereafter the rumor that he was insane would rise after each of his victories or defeats.

So, at Lancaster, Sherman reached the low point in a career which had been distinguished for its failures. In spite of his foster-father's influence—which he had always resisted—Sherman had not advanced rapidly after his graduation from West Point. After he left the army he had failed as a banker, in both San Francisco and New York; in both cities he had taken over his duties immediately before financial panics. He had not been able to provide for his family, and in fact had been separated from his wife and children for a good part of his married life. He had lost his confidence in himself. Since many high officials in the War Department believed him to be mentally unbalanced, his military career was apparently ended. Even the members of his family adopted a somewhat apologetic attitude in regard to him.

The crisis of Sherman's life was clearly apparent at this time, and it is interesting to compare the emphasis his biographers place on it. Sherman himself, in his "Memoirs," justified his actions, as did B. H. Liddell Hart in his military biography published a few years ago. Hart also pointed out acutely that Sherman's hatred of politicians and the press was an indication of how good a



politician and journalist he was; he saw the relation between public opinion and military victory. Now, in "Sherman, Fighting Prophet," Lloyd Lewis has written of this period in more detail, showing it as a definite turning point in Sherman's life, and contrasting his vacillating attitude before with his direct, purposeful manner afterwards.

It is a remarkable story, and "Sherman, Fighting Prophet," is an extremely interesting book; a fat, full, old-fashioned biography, rich in facts and lean in that random speculation and "imaginative evocation" which so frequently indicates nothing more than a lack of research by the biographer. Sherman's life was so interesting that a dull book about it seems an impossibility, although Sherman himself tried hard to write one in his two volumes of reminiscence. What makes the life seem so remarkable is the combination of forces—economic, political, individual—that lifted Sherman into power after his disgrace. In a very short time he was in command again, leading his troops on marches into the South which heartened the Northern armies and left the South paralyzed with fear.

One situation after another arose in which Sherman's peculiar experiences and talents could be used most effectively. Both Grant and Sherman rose in popularity not only because of their success but because the armies on the Eastern front were stalemated. Sectional antagonism, the agrarian West against the industrial East, helped Sherman's rise. The secret anti-war societies of the Northwest, planning revolution, lost power as each success of the Western army stimulated sectional pride. It is the most impressive feature of Mr. Lewis' biography that he does

(Continued on Page 59)

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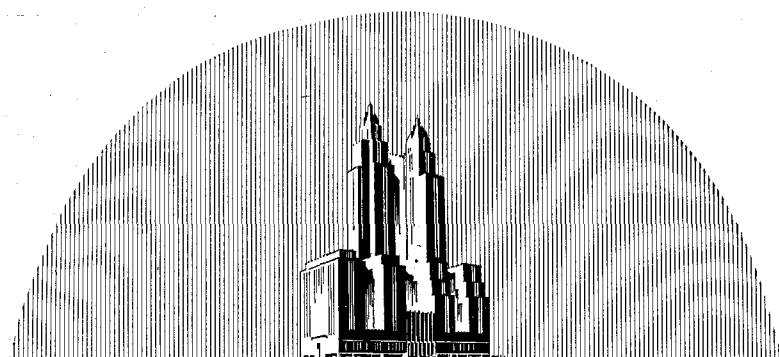
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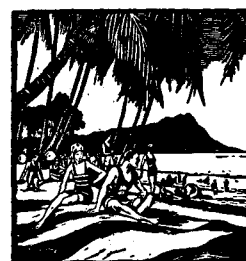
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Outlook's Book Choice

(Continued from page 56)

not set up Sherman as an exceptional individual, endowed with mysterious gifts; instead he analyzes the political and economic situation of the country, the intrigues of the Union generals, and Sherman's peculiar fitness for the sort of tasks which suddenly became available for him.

It is curious that Sherman's very failures as a civilian contributed to his success as a soldier. Because he had refused his foster-father's influence as a young man he had been consigned to unimportant army posts in the South, with the result that in the crisis his knowledge of the country and the people enabled him to act directly where the other generals were hesitant or baffled. Because he had taught in the South, after his failure as a banker, he knew the characteristics of the people, and knew the kind of tactics which would frighten and demoralize them. How keen his knowledge was, and how completely his judgments were verified by events, Mr. Lewis makes clear by quoting from a letter Sherman wrote to Lincoln; the letter is a masterly piece of social analysis, with the class difference of Southern society acutely seen and formulated.

Foraging, his men brought the hard fact of war to the civilians, while at the same time the lack of a supply train enabled them to move swiftly. Sherman knew the value of drama. Communication with the North was cut off, and for more than a month the huge army was lost, disappearing into the enemy country like a diver plunging under water, as Mr. Lewis says, with the rumors reaching home "like bubbles rising to the surface." Then the simple message: "Atlanta is ours and fairly won."

This is an exciting book, and one which throws a good deal of light, not only on Sherman's character, but on the whole complex situation of the Civil War. It is quite illuminating that at Missionary Ridge, where the common soldiers were victorious through their own efforts, and in spite of the fact that their officers were completely confused, Sherman thought that Grant had been responsible. Believing in discipline and strong central authority, he gave Grant credit for the victory—while Grant, at that time, had not known what was actually taking place.

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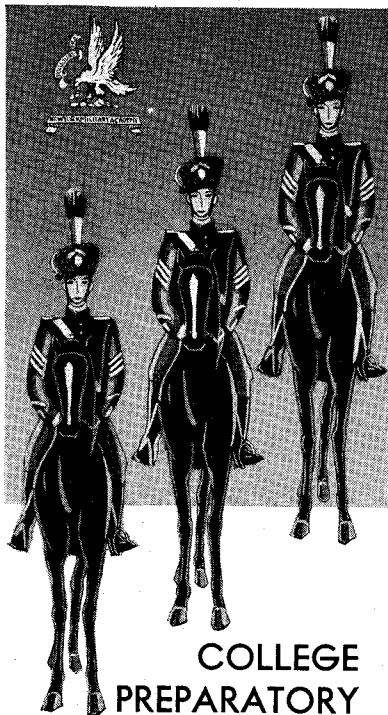
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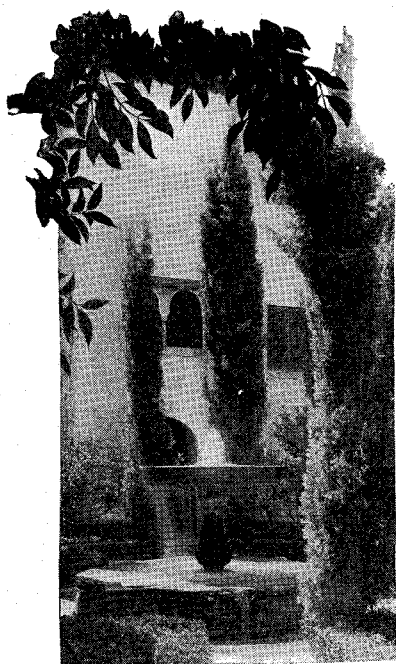
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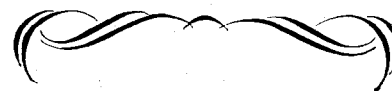
IF IT BE COINCIDENCE, then it is a happy one, that Switzerland has been chosen for so many of those international conferences—such as Mrs. Anne O'Hare McCormick discusses in her article to be found on another page of this number of NEW OUTLOOK.

Today, as during many, many decades of the past, travelers stepping over the borders of France or Italy, Austria or Germany, directly into Switzerland and seeking a more tranquil life, or a by-path from international strife—have found them. From the moment one crosses over into Switzerland, one ascends to new and higher altitudes which make for clarity of vision and a complete change of viewpoint. No diagnostician could recommend a healthier change of air, or a more healing landscape for an ailing world. Once inside of Switzerland one, per force of Nature, looks down upon the rest of the world and finds its people but pygmies and its troubled affairs just so many tempests in tiny earthen teapots.

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