

Pioneers of Empire

THE BIG FOUR. By Oscar Lewis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$4.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

THIS is the story of pioneers, the four men who built the Central Pacific Railroad, the first trans-continental iron highway that spanned this or any other continent. These four pioneers really gave birth to the vision of Theodore Dehone Judah. His eccentric brain had gestated into a considerable degree of maturity the child which The Big Four fathers adopted—Charles Crocker, Mark Hopkins, Leland Stanford, and Collis B. Huntington. They built the Union Pacific across the trans-Mississippi-Pacific country over the mountains through the desert to the Pacific Ocean. Later Huntington became the genius of the Southern Pacific which ran from San Francisco, South and then West, through New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas and across the old South into Washington. Huntington's empire later became Harriman's.

The Big Four built this trans-continental railroad across a territory that had come so recently under Anglo-Saxon law that it was for all purposes lawless. Their project started and finished during the War between the States and the early days of reconstruction following that war. If laws rested lightly on the trans-Mississippi Empire the war and the ways of war wiped out law in what was even then known as the wild and woolly West. The story of The Big Four is the story of men who made their own laws—laws to suit their needs. They were more than pioneers, captains of industry. They were

pioneers of industrial method of economic procedure from little business to big business. The practices they established, the customs which The Big Four improvised under necessity from month to month and year to year survived them. While they were building a railroad they were laying down the laws which would control big business in the United States for three decades. These laws were never enacted by Congress or by Legislatures. Big business, which means the capital industries of America in the last quarter of the old century, were set in a hard mortise of necessity. The morals made under those laws were the morals of the jungle. Those laws remained long after the far Western states had come into the domain of the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific and long after those states and the federal government had set up formal laws under the Anglo-Saxon ideal of morality. These hard laws of necessity took precedence over the written laws. The Big Four and their successors and assigns lived in another world from that where common men walked and worked in the humdrum life of that day.

Mr. Lewis's story of The Big Four—a study in the higher outlawry—is a book that intelligent Americans must read to know their country. It explains the rise of the American plutocracy after the Civil War. The book explains, by example, why the revolts of the Grangers, the Greenbackers, and Populists from the days of Lincoln until the days of McKinley were so futile even though their revolt was so just. It is a gorgeous tale that Mr. Lewis has told. He is a San Franciscan who fought in the World War,

has been a contributor to the magazines, and wrote under the title of "Men Against Mountains" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, this same story in an abbreviated form. The new form is vastly more interesting and important than the shorter story. The book leaves little to be desired in its structure, in its swift and engaging style, and its careful scholarship.

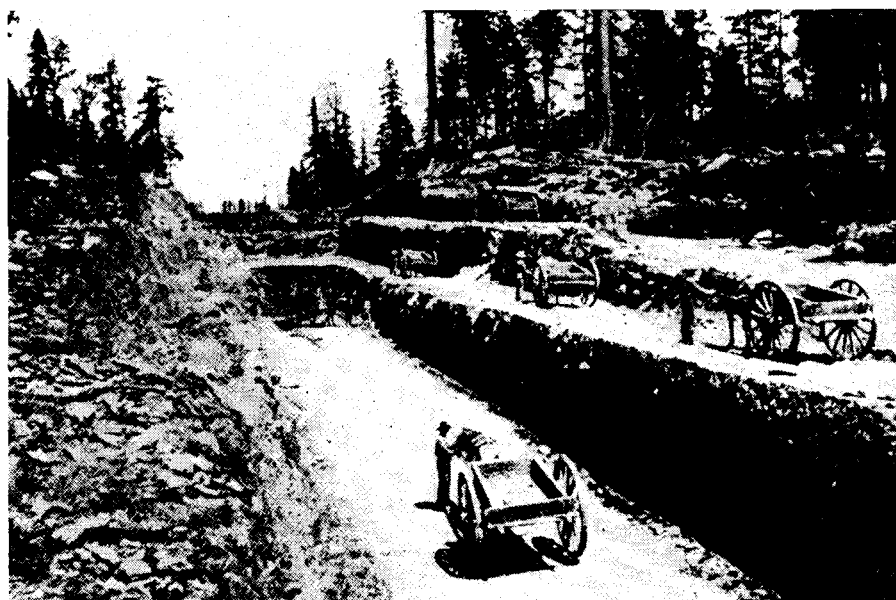
William Allen White is editor of The Emporia Gazette.

Democratic Czechoslovakia

AT THE CROSS-ROADS OF EUROPE: A symposium by Karel Capek, and others. Prague: PEN Club, by Orbis. 1938.

Reviewed by JOHN PALMER GAVIT

YOU cannot understand what is going on in and concerning Czechoslovakia, more particularly the spirit with which that little nation confronts the pan-German arrogance, without knowing something of the historic background of its people. Masaryk, Benes, Stefanik, dramatically outstanding, represent of course the undying passion of the human spirit for liberty, embodied in rebels and patriots of every people; but there is something special here. For six hundred years and more these Czechs, Moravians, Slovaks have stood upon a kind of island of democratic persistence, surrounded and storm-swept and habitually inundated by just such tyranny as threatens them today. Continuously conquered, persecuted, subordinated as a minority hardly even political, they never have yielded, never have been absorbed as other groups have been absorbed; they have continued through the centuries with all the pride and obduracy of the Jews. Czechoslovakia as a definitely prescribed political entity of boundaries and governmental self-sufficiency is of course the creation of the World War and the resulting dismemberment of Austria-Hungary and parts of Germany; but the spiritual entity is a thing continuous through almost the whole of the Christian era to this day . . . since this people first began to seep in from beyond the Carpathians to take the place of the dwindling population of German barbarians. And from the beginning it has been fighting "Germanism," which all the time has meant the same thing that it means now. But these twenty years of really national life have trained and materially equipped the little nation at what always has been "the cross-roads of Europe" to give account of itself if need be in the test of war. In this notable book well-known Czech and Slovak writers tell the whole story from the beginning, brilliantly, thrillingly. It is an invaluable addition to the growing literature of today's world problems.



Courtesy of the California State Library

A railroad cut in the Sierras about 1864—From "The Big Four."

A Wood near Athens

BETWEEN SLEEPING AND WAKING.
By Dorothy Charques. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

"THE SCENE," Shakespeare may tell us, "is a wood near Athens"; but as soon as Bully Bottom comes in, we know better; it is a wood near England. For England lies nearer than any other country to that region, at once earthy and enchanted, where one may meet both yokels as solid as gnarled trees and elves as insubstantial as moonlight, and the English authors who have best known their rustics have also known that magic wood. Thomas Hardy knew it, though only at the more shadowy end where all the spells are evil; and the late Mary Webb, whose country folk are the best since Hardy's, was at the time of her death working on a romance part of which was to take place in the Welsh Marches and part in a place she called "the Land of Betwixt-and-Between."

On the appearance of her first novel, "The Tramp and His Woman," Miss Dorothy Charques was compared both to Hardy and to Mary Webb; and the atmosphere of her "Between Sleeping and Waking" is very like that of Mary Webb's *Betwixt-and-Between*. The village where Eric Petersen settles to write his book, the public-house gossip, the genially eccentric clergyman, the bitter-tongued rat-catcher who has waited twenty-five years for the woman he loves and who takes her at last, gentleman's bastard and all—these are as sturdily their own everyday selves as anything in George Eliot. But Agnes, the poor young lady whose mind has been touched by the death of her husband in Africa, so that the vil-

lagers think she is a mere lunatic, belongs to the land of glamour and sorcery; and so does the whole story of the strange triangle, Eric, Agnes, and Agnes's sister Mary whom he loves. Agnes is a really extraordinary achievement; she is not lunatic, and yet one may turn the word into English and say that she is moonstruck; she lives in a region of the mind which has about it none of the horror of the madhouse, but only the mingled attraction and repulsion of the old Celtic fairy-lands where human beings might be kidnapped, to live for ever in a country terribly beautiful and terribly strange. She might so easily seem merely silly, but she haunts the mind like some old song in a minor key.

And yet, remarkable as the book is for making convincing two such divergent atmospheres, it is far from leaving one wholly satisfied. In trying to analyze it critically, one asks oneself why the village idiot is Agnes's illegitimate half-brother. Are they meant to balance, showing the white and the black magic of lunacy? And what is the significance of Africa? Why are we told, not only that Agnes's husband was killed there, nobody knows how, but that her father had always longed to go there? Why is his great map one of the first and the last objects mentioned in the book? And there are other questions one must ask, and cannot answer, about "Between Sleeping and Waking." Perhaps that is why it is so haunting. An old scholar of my acquaintance, who has been interested all his life in psychical research, says that one can tell the difference between the true and the false ghost story by one test: the true haunting always leaves one puzzled as to its meaning.

Twenty-four Hours in the Antipodes

WATERWAY. By Eleanor Dark. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

THIS story covers twenty-four hours in the life of an expensive suburb of Sydney, Australia. It is surprising—it shouldn't be, but it is—to think that there are suburbs in the Antipodes, which the imagination ignorantly fills with only the larger forms of life. But this is a suburb with a difference. It is only in a general way that it resembles Putney or Bronxville. Its shadow is blacker, its light more brilliant, and it seems always about to throw off its domesticity and return to something more primitive. It won't, of course and alas, but the threat is there.

Such, at least, is the impression you get from Miss Dark's novel, and this is its chief claim to success. It has atmosphere and the atmosphere never weakens.

The characters, however, are less impressive, possibly because too much has been put upon them. They are under the necessity of revealing, within the limits of one day, what one day scarcely gives so many people a chance to reveal—and that is, their destiny. The author, it is true, concludes with a ferry disaster, which those who have something to live for survive, and those who haven't don't; and thus tidies everything up. But in the meantime, for most of the book, they have to live their lives in a state of tension, as though they were spending their last day



Eleanor Dark

together in a condemned cell, with not enough reprieves to go around.

For instance, Winifred discovers that her sister-in-law may possibly provide the evidence—false evidence—which will enable her husband to divorce her. She wants to divorce Arthur and marry Ian, but her child is blind, and she dare not risk losing the custody of it. Meanwhile her father finds that he has cancer, and her sister realizes that Sim, to whom she yielded the night before, is not so important to her as Roger, though more beautiful. Into this pattern, or spider's web, there stumble other characters, all of them in a state of excitement. They meet, casually or for long conversations; they part; they meet again. Then comes the ferry disaster—a very vivid piece of writing—in which people like Arthur die; and you perceive that the snail is, after all, on the thorn.

Miss Dark has not quite succeeded in distinguishing between wilderness and labyrinth, between multiplicity of characters and interaction of characters. The story, like the suburb, sometimes threatens to return to something more primitive—to a mere succession of incidents. But, as you read it, it does seem as if an infinitesimal part of the map of the world had suddenly shivered and come alive; and to have achieved this is, in itself, success.



Photograph by Army and Navy stores
Dorothy Charques