

Fiction: *The most significant novel of this week is the late Charles Williams's "The Place of the Lion," a magnificent achievement in which supernatural and dramatic events are interwoven with spiritual concepts and a daring use of fantasy. No novel could be more unlike this English work than "Rock Wagram," William Saroyan's lush story of a naive California Armenian who swings from being a Fresno barkeeper to being a Hollywood motion-picture star with the greatest of ease. The world of Ilka Chase's "New York 22," a lively account of the amorous goings-on of a Park Avenue family, is a very opposite one to that of "Diligence in Love," by Daisy Newman, the tender story of a career woman converted to the Quaker faith, and Ruth Moore's "Candlemas Bay," a novel of the Maine fishing industry, salted with adventure and romance. For readers who like English novels of manners we recommend Humphrey Pakington's "Farewell to Otterley," a story of the downfall of a great country house."*

A Man Who Hates Nobody

ROCK WAGRAM. By William Saroyan. New York: Doubleday & Co. 301 pp. \$3.50.

By JOHN BROOKS

ANYONE who has ever read much of Mr. Saroyan's past fiction already knows a good deal about Rock Wagram. He is an Armenian from the California interior, with a philosophical turn, and he insists that he, like all Armenians, hates nobody but the Turks, whom he does not hate enough. He likes Armenians, old cars, Indian-head pennies, and children. It is part of his charm that he is not afraid of making wide open statements such as, "After they've bathed and put on clean clothes and are comfortable and feel fine [people] bore me. Before they do these things they fascinate me." Almost everyone loves him, and when he meets a policeman he knew casually years earlier the policeman immediately calls him Rock and asks him whether Yale is a good school for a boy or not. Rock answers in oracular fashion. (He is not quite sure about the policeman's name, however.)

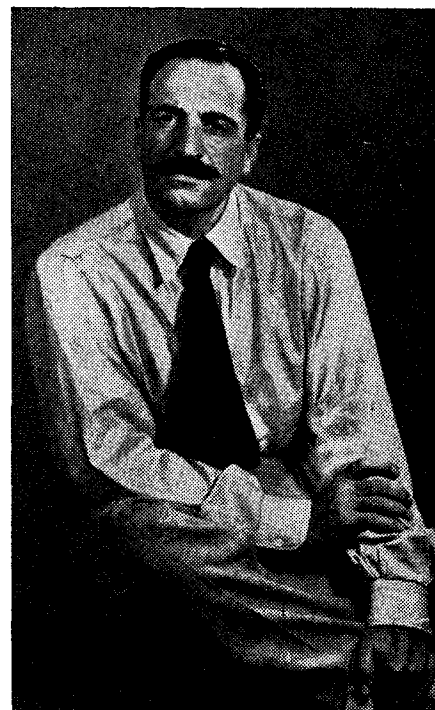
The specific facts about the familiar Saroyan hero are that he comes from Winery Street, Fresno, and that he was Arak Vagramian, the bartender at Fat Aram's in Fresno, until one day a movie magnate picked him out for a character part. After that he became the star of many bad pictures, married a New York society girl, had two children, was divorced, went to San Francisco and dropped out of the public eye, and eventually went back to Hollywood to make money to support his children.

It is difficult to say at exactly what

point in this career Mr. Saroyan's story begins, for Rock and his opinions always have precedence over the mere exigencies of time; as a result the narrative takes off unaccountably every few pages into backward or forward leaps ranging from days to years. These interludes—they cannot properly be called flashbacks since they go forward as often as back and since the reader is not always sure what the date is *now*—are interspersed with italicized sections serving as a sort of chorus that deal loosely with the narrative and directly with the philosophical matters that interest Mr. Saroyan, such as, "The only thing a man does all his life is breathe" and "Why isn't a man the Ambassador to Spain?"

It is interesting that this time the Saroyan hero is an actor, for Mr. Saroyan himself has become something of a character actor in print—perhaps too much of one, indeed, to be capable of creating other characters. Rock Wagram and his opinions so permeate this book that the other people in it are little more than vignettes seen through Rock's eyes. The most important of these are Paul Key, a Jewish movie producer who once wrote a good play which failed; Rock's mother, embodying the simple virtues of baking bread and being an Armenian; and his sometime wife, Ann Ford, who, in Rock's view at least, believes only in "clothes, hats, cosmetics, shoes, parties, nice people, famous people, exciting people, happy people, plans for parties, plans for eating and drinking and talking the rest of her life with nice people." What Ann's view of Rock is remains cloudy.

There can be no question that Mr.



—H. Kronzian.

William Saroyan—"a drunken quality."

Saroyan is sentimental, yet at times—unfortunately few in this book—he can write a scene so wildly and gloriously sentimental that it becomes absurd and even ungrateful to say, "Saroyan is sentimental." As to the italicized ruminations there can be little question that they are occasionally trenchant. ("A man needs his family . . . whether he loves or hates them . . . he needs a little of them, he needs at least a moment of them now and then.") There can also be little question that a good many of these ruminations to anyone who does not fly on Mr. Saroyan's special beam are downright nonsensical and not in the least profound. They have a drunken quality—not the drunkenness of liquor but of life itself. They are full of painfully obvious statements tediously and insistently repeated, full of self-contradiction and cancelings-out, full of the beery adoption of meaningless words as temporary pets—full, in short, of sloppy writing:

No man loves anyone but himself, but that is also a lie, as every man knows. Every man loves his own damned son, damned before he's born, damned to live a variation of his own damned father's life, damned to live a winking variation of the damned life every man lives. Every man loves his own damned winking daughter, winking in the eyes of her own damned mother. Every man loves his own damned winking daughter's mother. Every man loves . . .

At any rate, this book bears a special stamp: it could not possibly have been written by anyone living except Mr. Saroyan.

The Nature of Reality

THE PLACE OF THE LION. By Charles Williams. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy. 236 pp. \$3.

By WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

THE LATE Charles Williams could do something that almost no one else can do; he could make a spiritual idea come alive in the flesh-and-blood world of fiction. More than that, he could tell a rattling good story. Read simply for the action his novels crackle with excitement. "The Place of the Lion" (his first novel, published here originally in 1932 and reprinted now to please a growing Williams cult) opens characteristically with a lion in the most unlikely place imaginable, an English lane. From the physical drama of the lion hunt we progress rapidly to terrors more supernatural and more intense; for instance, to a prim parlor in which the hero struggles for his life against a man and woman bestially possessed by powers of evil, to a house that explodes into unquenchable flame, and at last to something ominously like the end of the world—prevented by the hero just in time.

Meanwhile Williams presents in the character of Damaris Tighe a striking satirical study. Damaris is a lady scholar, after the school prevailing today—in which a man may spend his life and earn his Ph.D. "settling X's relation to the thought of his time" without ever once asking whether what X thought was true. To such "scholarship" dead men's bones are no more than a ladder on which to climb into college jobs. Thus Damaris writes with solemn self-importance of the correspondence between Platonic eidola and medieval angels—without understanding the eidola or believing in the angels. It is Williams's unique gift which makes Damaris nevertheless enchanting. In other hands—as so often in life—this sort of humorless, learned female-on-the-make would be detestable. But Williams makes her absurdity an endearing absurdity. Damaris is rather a lamb, and by the Lamb in the end she is saved—not, however, without getting her comeuppance first. For a dabbling occultist accidentally brings the eidola and the angels into the material world, terribly incarnate; and at the touch of their burning reality the world crumbles into nothingness.

Anthony himself, riding the stallion of swiftness to Damaris's rescue, is the incarnation of one of Williams's

dominant themes—the identity of sexual love with the Divine charity. To the materialist, dyspeptic with ill-digested Freud, who sneers at religious experience as "only sex," Williams might well answer that sex is only God. In "The Descent of the Dove," his extraordinarily illuminating history of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, he clarifies the distinction between the personal love, Eros, and the impersonal Christian love, Agape — and unites the two with the profound and haunting phrase of an early martyr: My Eros is crucified. It is this crucified Eros which saves Damaris.

Perhaps of all Williams's novels "The Place of the Lion" is the most profound metaphysically. Elsewhere he stays fairly well within the framework of space and time; "War in Heaven" turns on the Holy Grail, "Many Dimensions" on the Crown of Solomon, "All Hallows' Eve" on a flesh-and-blood magus working prescribed spells, "The Greater Trumps" on the potencies locked within a deck of Tarot cards. All these are material, if magical, powers. But in "The Place of the Lion" we come to grips with the very nature of reality itself, and the material is revealed as a mere airy dance of dust-motes around its central abstract ideas. The atoms disrupt, and what blazes forth is pure energy—Energy Himself.

No doubt it is fairly improbable that the heavenly virtues of which Williams writes should ever actually appear to men as golden lions and crowned serpents or that rows of suburban bungalows, however jerry-built, should collapse at their touch. Yet Williams does more than make us believe it happened in his story. He makes us see that it is always happening—that in a sense it is the only thing which happens. His work is fundamentally different from the "supernatural fantasies"; one might say that his novels are not fantasy at all but a realism which concerns itself with essences instead of surfaces. Most fantasy makes its effect by exploiting the antithesis between the Natural—seen as the "real," commonplace, everyday world—and an unreal Supernatural. But Williams's point is that the Natural is the Supernatural. The bread and wine are the body and blood of God—what else could they be? And reading him we feel like the blind man who was given his sight and saw people like trees walking.

William Lindsay Gresham's novels include "Nightmare Alley" and "Limbo Tower."

The Inner Light

DILIGENCE IN LOVE. By Daisy Newman. New York: Doubleday & Co. 253 pp. \$2.75.

By JESSAMYN WEST

DAISY NEWMAN in this novel tells the story of a conversion. A conversion, to use the theological definition, "is the spiritual change by which the soul is turned to God from spiritual indifference or gross forms of sin." As such it is not only a suitable subject for narrative treatment; since it deals with man's moral complexity, one of the supreme subjects; in addition, it has by its very nature of being a "turning" the merit of possessing inherent dramatic potentialities. And conversions have been thus recognized and thus used in literature from the time of Saul's vision on the road to Damascus in the New Testament to Larry Darrell's experience on the road to the movies (which does not discredit it) in "The Razor's Edge."

Obviously the significance of such a conversion for the reader hinges upon who is converted—and from what. A mere turning is not enough; for it to be consequential a person of consequence must be involved. In "Diligence in Love" Vaughn Hill, a "sophisticated advertising woman," turns from spiritual indifference to Quakerism, from writing unethical copy about poor furnaces and un-sturdy can-openers for an unprincipled agency to writing honest copy about good radios for a high-principled Quaker.

Vaughn Hill when the story opens is thirty-eight years old, the wife of Dennis Hill, whom she loves, and the mother of two children. She is on her way from New York, where she lives and works, to the small Rhode Island town of Kendal, where she plans to investigate an old Underground railroad station used by the Quakers. She hopes somehow to incorporate what she learns there in an advertisement for a present-day top-of-the-ground railroad. She boards the train in New York dressed in "pure silk," wearing a "honey of a hat," and thinking as she sees herself in a mirror that she "looks definitely important."

In Kendal she is met by Philip Ludlow, a man with whom she has had some correspondence about the Underground. He is a widower, "an odd person, religious," a Quaker, in fact, "though he looked quite normal in his herringbone topcoat and gray felt hat." He calls her Vaughn, Quaker fashion, and asks her to supper. Vaughn accepts but thinks, "In New York . . . what this man is doing would seem absolutely crazy. On an

