

Ruin of a Gradely Man

THE HEART OF FAME. By Giles Playfair. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 368 pp. \$3.

By WALTER HAVIGHURST

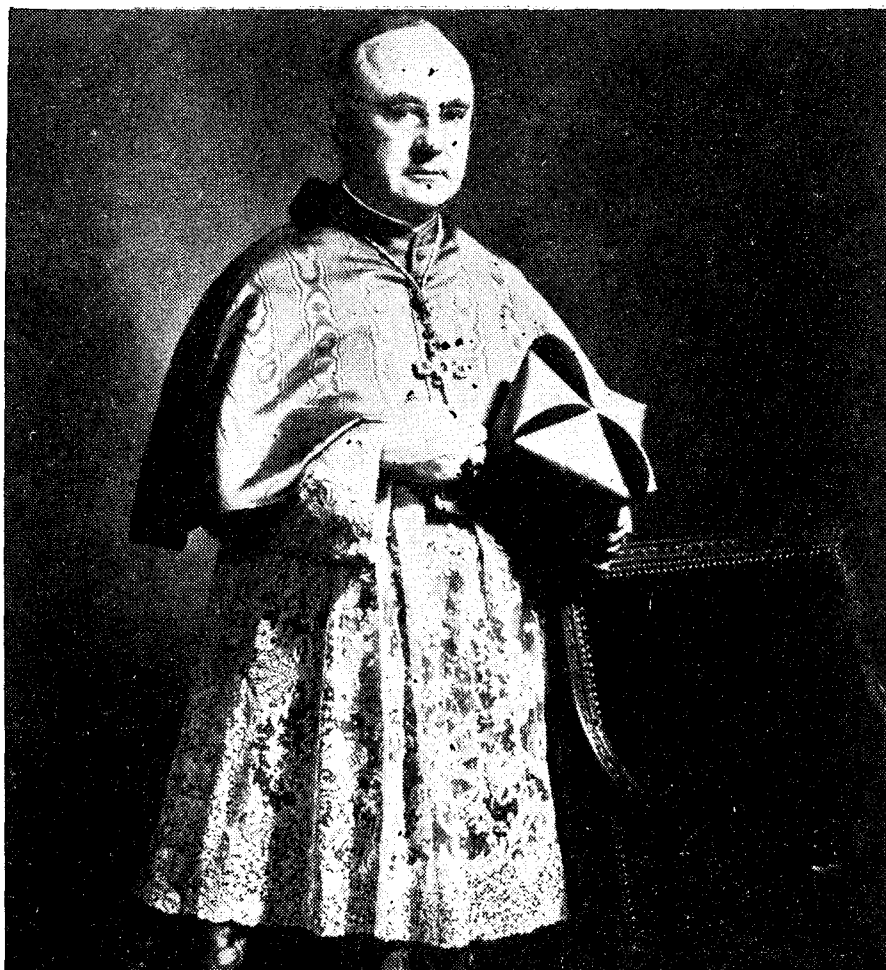
THE INDUSTRIAL town of Manchester in the smoky English midlands would not seem a likely place to discover a brilliant actor. But there Paul Hunter, young drama critic and playwright, first heard the arresting voice of Charles Stranleigh, whose name was to become familiar throughout the theatrical world. At an amateur performance forty years ago began the career of a man of great gifts and fatal weaknesses.

Stranleigh was a young man without family background, without stage experience, without any artistic schooling. He was a clerk in the Northern Dyestuffs Company, a man of simple tastes and a simple nature. He had the plain virtues of his Lancashire up-bringing; to use a Lancashire word he was a "gradely" man. But wealth and fame changed all that.

Mr. Playfair's novel follows this career of success and misfortune with external patience and fidelity, showing how his love affairs brought wretchedness to one woman after another and how his success carried him on the road to ruin. This has a familiar sound; there have been actors of Charles Stranleigh's kind before, and doubtless they will continue to appear both in fiction and in the flesh. To make such a portrait credible and informing a novelist must convince a reader of the exceptional gifts and the destroying tensions of his character. But Stranleigh is an oddly rigid person, more credible as Lancashireman than as man of genius, and there is no incandescence in him.

At an early point in Charles Stranleigh's career the young actor profited from the tutelage of Norman Grant, a forgotten figure of the London stage. A well-worn stereotype, "this reformed drunkard, this actor who could no longer act, this teacher who by a chance discovery of a pupil had found new hope of self-fulfillment" made Stranleigh a speech which might have offered him a kind of warning. "Acting," he said, "is not a tangible thing. It has no substance of its own, like literature or music or painting. It is a tradition. It is a torch carried by the great players of every age. . . ."

But perhaps this lack of substance in the actor's profession is meant to account for Stranleigh's corruption. He would have been happier had he lived out his life in Manchester as an office clerk. He might have continued to be "gradely" there.



—Fabian Bachrach.

Francis Cardinal Spellman: "I had to write it."

Cleaved by the Axe of Religion

THE FOUNDLING. By Francis Cardinal Spellman. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 304 pp. \$2.75.

By HARRISON SMITH

"THE FOUNDLING" is the first novel of Francis Cardinal Spellman of the Diocese of New York and Fifth Avenue's famous St. Patrick's Cathedral. The most callous reviewer would be forced to regard it with some awe, for it is a literary event of historical importance and it is a tribute to the energy and vitality of an extraordinarily busy man. It is, in fact, difficult to write about "The Foundling" without falling into some of the Cardinal's clichés, as if the critic became slightly intoxicated by his sudden immersion into an almost totally unfamiliar world in which godliness and kindness reigned supreme. Anyone who is accustomed to the yearly and monthly deluge of the works of novelists who are, in the light of this book, obviously imbued with the most reprehensible sentiments about humanity and who re-

gard man's fate and his final destination with dismay can only take his tongue out of his cheek and throw his didactic approach toward the art of fiction into the nearest wastebasket. The reviewer of a novel by a writer of the Cardinal's eminence, dedicated "to the multitude of passers-by and the many of every creed who enter St. Patrick's open door therein quietly to pray," must abandon cynicism and take off his hat to the motives which have inspired its creation and to the vitality of the story he has to tell.

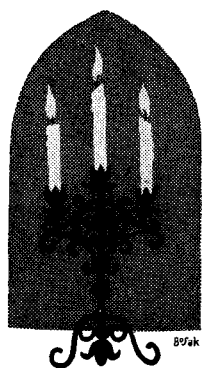
"The Foundling" begins with an embittered, armless, and disfigured soldier of the First World War who stumbles into the Cathedral on Christmas Eve to discover a living baby lying in the crèche beside the figures of the Infant Jesus and Mary His Mother. He takes it to the Catholic Foundling Hospital, which cares for abandoned babies regardless of race, creed, or color. The soldier's faith in the future is restored; he marries the girl he loves in the hope that he can then adopt little Peter. But here the author runs into an insuperable dif-

ficulty. Paul Taggart is a Protestant, and there is no way in which his great need or his wife's for this miraculously discovered baby can be satisfied. The author faces this apparently cruel obstacle courageously, as Henry Morton Robinson in his novel "The Cardinal" had to face a year before other obdurate rules of the Church, which may have seemed to the non-Catholic reader harsh or unnecessary.

In fact, Cardinal Spellman's attitude toward this and toward religion itself will prove to be of deep interest to the thoughtful reader. When Paul, with the aid of a Catholic friend, attempts to possess Peter by trickery the sainted nun who has discovered his ruse says, "You think that because I do not tell you that all religions are the same or that each is like the other I am intolerant. But were I to say these things and you would call me tolerant I would then truly be a sham, a hypocrite." Cardinal Spellman appears in person at this moment to add: "Thus they stood, two who yearned to be one as friends, cleaved by the axe religion. And the destiny of the tow-headed boy was for them a symbol of all humanity shunted and sacrificed because peoples of different beliefs refused to respect the good faith and the good works of others."

Joined Flames

By Katharine Day Little



A beech - tree's heart-shaped flames
Burned, green that was newest gold
New - minted sharp-cut leaves
Reached to a flawless sky
And fleckless praised thy name
Mary the flawless one

Of May the flower and flame.

Inside the song of prayer
Deep as the soul's Dark Night
Welled from the young sweet throats
And died in golden air.
Tall formal altar-flames
Flickered and fell again
Molten as notes that rose
In Palestrina's soul.
Slowly the burning green
Joined with the flowering flames
To praise thee flawless one
Of May fire flower and queen.

The reader may object that it was the nun who was refusing to respect the Protestant's good faith, since Paul had agreed to bring up the child as a Catholic, nor is the situation remedied by the author's non-sequitur: "In less than two decades godless leaders, compromising truth and justice in their mad march to power would attack all religions . . . and drench the whole world in the obscene waste of war." There would appear to be an illogical hiatus between the child in the Foundling Home and the Cardinal's "obscene waste of war," unless he is attempting to say that like a fighting army the Church must obey rules and orders, however cruel, or lose the war.

At any rate, Peter remains in an orphanage until he is adult. The author had at first intended to make him an Army doctor but chose to turn him into a musician instead, because "it would sacrifice the continuity of the story of institutional life." Therefore Peter became a musician, "for music, like medicine, bespeaks a universal language of the heart." This transformation is accomplished with skill, for the reader is induced to believe that the nun who played the organ in the orphanage might have completed three movements of a great symphony before her death, and that Peter had been diligent enough at his music lessons to complete it some day. In the end Peter is drafted into the Second World War and, like the soldier who found him by the altar, suffers for it before he receives his reward. He is blinded and returns home to find his girl ready to take him in her arms. The reader may be certain that his destiny as a musician and composer will not be thwarted by the fact that he is blind.

In this bald treatment of "The Foundling" the humanity and depth of feeling of the author have been neglected. Cardinal Spellman after a lifetime of devotion and love for suffering people has created characters and scenes that may remain in the reader's memory. The young nun in the Foundling Hospital is not a stereotype, nor are her devoted Sisters in the orphanage bloodless figures. There is an old sacristan bedeviled by choir boys; a colored lad, Peter's best friend; a Jewish philanthropist; and many others who are drawn obviously from life. In the end the reader can only applaud what the author has said of his own book. "Why did I write 'The Foundling'? . . . I had to write it, for it was born in the womb of my intellect and given birth by the love of my heart for little children and for all mankind." There are few writers who are today capable of this kind of honesty and frankness; but then there are few Cardinals who have had the courage to write a novel.

Not a Nazi!

THE STEPS OF THE QUARRY. By Robert Terrall. New York: Crown Publishers. 350 pp. \$3.

By VAN VAN PRAAG

WARS go on, it seems, and as long as they do continue there will be men with something important to say about them. "The Steps of the Quarry" is another novel in the yet unfinished history of World War II, although it cannot strictly be categorized as a war novel. Rather, it is a novel about some of the results of that now nearly forgotten big war, results affecting the conqueror, the conquered, and the liberated. The conquerors are, of course, the Americans; the conquered are the Nazis; and the liberated are the ones who managed to survive both the ordeal of the concentration camp and the treatment by their American liberators.

This novel, a first one and a very good one, by Robert Terrall, tells a story of the Austrian occupation and does it on three levels. First, it is a highly-charged account of American GI's let loose in the town of Weissau, bringing their particular brand of democracy to the conquered and the liberated by whoring, drinking, trading in the black-market, looting, pillaging, assaulting, murdering, all the while cracking corny jokes with the aplomb of village loafers on a lazy summer afternoon. Secondly, it is a gruesome account of the notorious Mordhausen (houses-of-murder) concentration camp just outside of the town, where some 600,000 assorted Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Jews, and some anti-Nazi Austrians perished. Mordhausen was not wholly an annihilation camp where these thousands were merely run through the gas chambers or the ovens; actually it was a quarry where prisoners carried huge stones on their backs up a flight of 180 crude steps, working under the clubs and whips of their guards until they died. Finally, it is the story of businessmen like Alois Resch, an industrialist who though not a Nazi was forced through economic necessity to utilize the services of slave labor. Resch, like the Krupps and others of that ilk, was not a Nazi. Resch was a simple businessman, a non-political; thousands died working for him, but he was, repeat, not a Nazi!

Robert Terrall has written a big book and has ably presented a large, detailed picture of the initial stages of our Austrian occupation. There are our rowdy, amoral GI's, as represented by the black-marketeers and others
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