

too much of a pawn, more sinned against than sinning, but a kind of waif-wife, with the waif's self-pity and half-clinging dependence. The shape of her life is drawn by the men who own her, in the various meanings of ownership—no band of angels, certainly, except in the most ironic sense, yet the means by which her waifism is stiffened and saved until she can discriminate her truth from her error and be born into life. Which is to say, into freedom: the good air at the mouth of the cavern.

Yet each of Amantha's "angels" is enslaved, too, awaiting the moment of egress, the mind-born conviction that one is at liberty to take action for good or ill, for ill or good, but in any case with free choice. Her father, Aaron Starr, to take the first example, conceived the child on the body of the slave Renie. He thinks that by raising Amantha as a lady he can deliver her from the bonds of her origin. But the solace he seeks with Miss Idell, whose name is almost a pun, is the very means by which his impoverishment becomes inevitable so that when he dies his daughter's bonds are riveted the more firmly. Or there is Seth Parton, Amantha's dour and pietistic Oberlin sweetheart, slave to the doctrine of self-sanctification, whose ultimate release, again through Miss Idell, comes in slashing cold-eyed financiering, the making of a fortune in the Chicago grain-market.

The forms human bondage may take are legion. The assumed name of Hamish Bond of New Orleans, Amantha's owner, protector, and lover, might also be a pun. His bondage to the past, which comes out in a horrific, bloody, nightmarish, half-cynical flashback to the days when he traded for slaves in the Congo, is only to be expiated now by a kindness so calmly powerful that it overruns him like a disease. Another disease, a form of social narcissism, besets Tobias Sears, the handsome young Union captain and idealistic disciple of Massachusetts transcendentalism, who marries Amantha Starr in a mixture of noble motives. His bondage is to his own sense of magnanimity. For if Bond had kindness like a disease, Sears had nobility like an epidemic.

If this is not Warren's best novel, a guerdon I would still reserve for "All the King's Men," it is a good book on a serious and important subject, giving another thematic emphasis to his perennial preoccupation: the perils of self-deception in the blind lobby of self. Freedom—from what? For what? These questions are as important as ever in the affairs of men. Warren offers a variety of applicable answers.

TV God in Focus

"The Great Man," by Al Morgan (E. P. Dutton. 317 pp. \$3.50), is a devastating fictional inquiry into the private life of a man who was worshipped by millions as a sweet and lovable radio and TV character. Just who could the author have in mind?

By Allen Churchill

THROUGH the centuries fiction writers have been fascinated by women of the streets and—only a degree less—by the man without heart or conscience, in our time called the heel, louse, or bum. Latest to tackle the type is TV producer-writer Al Morgan, who in his first novel, "The Great Man," does not stray from his chosen industry. His main character (one could never say hero) is named Herb Fuller. On radio homespun, lovable, ever-relaxed Herb amassed a following of fifteen million and with the advent of TV added millions more, to become (with the Fuller Family) the medium's Great Man.

But the Great Man enjoys driving fast cars faster and rubs himself out against a Connecticut hillside. Quickly grabbing an ambitious young radio gabber named Ed Harris as his successor, the network sets him to preparing a Herb Fuller Memorial Hour. Then the fun—and the book—begins.

Herb Fuller, it seems, was a guy who could make millions choke while reading a prayer over the air, but while doing it he made obscene gestures with his hands. He delighted in skirting obscenity, becoming "smuttier and smuttier on the air, and

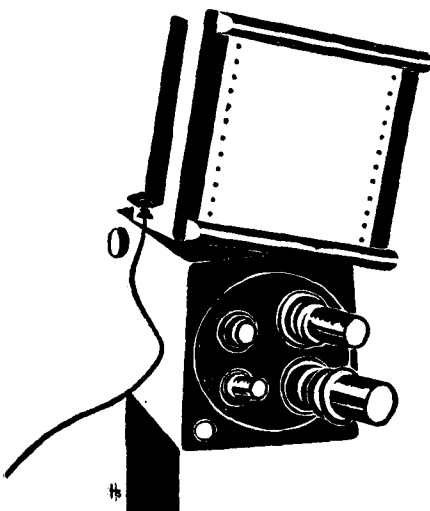
strangely enough the people who loved his sermons and hymns loved this too." He was also a lush, a sadist, and a satyr, who availed himself of all his pretty young girl assistants. Says one associate interviewed by Ed Harris, "He could take words, roll them over those cockeyed tonsils of his, and make people believe they were listening to something important or profound." Another calls him Peck's Bad Choir Boy, to make the understatement of all time. Everyone interviewed for the Memorial Hour expresses the belief that someone must have tinkered with Herb's car to make it drive into that hill.

BUT instead of writing a whodunit, Mr. Morgan is content to keep his novel a who-is-it, and everyone familiar with radio, TV, or the headlines will have his guess as to who Herb is. He's more than slightly patterned after one entertainment figure who, like Herb, "used to hold the kids up to ridicule on the air. You could see the iron fist slipping out of the velvet glove. . . . He got petulant and nasty."

What's more surprising than the obviousness of Herb Fuller is the fact that Mr. Morgan also manages to make him fascinating. As evidence of the true Herb piles up (in interviews cleverly managed by the TV-wise author), the reader, like those millions of listeners, is pulled into Herb's web. "Which came first, the celebrity or the bastard?" one character wonders.

Asks his pretty pony-tail secretary, "What was there about him that made it necessary for him to sleep with all the women he had around him and beat the hell out of the ego of all the men?" You wonder too, and though Mr. Morgan comes up with no answers the surface portrait he paints is absorbing. So are the other characters, especially the girls and Sid, the Madison Avenue talker. Only in Ed Harris does Mr. Morgan fail to tie up his package. Ed is as weak as a sugary ending on a realistic TV script. First, his status is always difficult to figure, for he seems to be little more than a disc jockey, and since when have deejays been told to research and write hour-long programs? Then, in an effort to make him likable, Mr. Morgan has diluted his brash personality. In life Ed would fight as hard as Herb Fuller for the main chance. Too bad Mr. Morgan doesn't let him.

But in Herb Fuller the author has his character. Herb has tremendous shock value, but beyond that he's also believable. Somehow you feel he could exist. TV, anyone?



—Jacket design for "The Great Man."

"... the iron fist ... the velvet glove."

The Spell of Gunner's

"The Stepmother," by R. C. Hutchinson (Rinehart, 310 pp. \$3.50), by the author of *"Elephant and Castle,"* tells of the efforts of a second wife to build a bridge of understanding between her husband and his son.

By Edmund Fuller

PROBLEMS of the true self, its discovery and its liberation from constricting bonds, underlie R. C. Hutchinson's new novel, *"The Stepmother."* These Mr. Hutchinson handles with his customary practised skill and penetrating perception. In its unfolding story it prompts the reader, accustomed to many of the situation clichés of current fiction, to anticipate developments. Hutchinson's taste is such that he never fulfils an obvious expectation.

Catherine de Lauzun, a Canadian, approaching middle age, is secretary to Lawrence Ashland, a restrained British civil servant of some rank involved in international work concerning DPs. He is a widower. Catherine is taken by surprise when, in Geneva, he proposes to her. It seems a last door opening to her. Both recognize the union as essentially a marriage of quiet, companionable accommodation.

When she is ensconced in Gunner's, his English home, she finds it a place dominated by the spell, tradition, or legend of Josie, the deceased wife. Josie had been a beauty, but had met with a paralyzing accident, and as a cripple had borne Lawrence two children. Her courage has become a byword.

The old English house dominated by the memory of a former wife is the area of threatened cliché. But Mr. Hutchinson has nothing of either the Brontë or Du Maurier type in mind. The focus of Catherine's attention becomes Lawrence's strangely withdrawn son, Stephen.

There hangs over this young man a shadow from his army career in World War II. He shot a fellow officer under circumstances complex enough to result only in his washing out of the service. Between Stephen and his father there is no bridge. Catherine sets about in good faith to construct such a bridge and finds herself involved in conflicts more tangled than she had known. Not the least of the

problems is the strange marriage Stephen is about to contract under compulsive motivations.

By a slow peeling back of layers, working particularly through the period of a critical illness of Stephen's, Mr. Hutchinson explores the nature of Josie. It is no female villain he proposes to disclose to us, à la "Rebecca." There was indeed something valiant and fine in her. Yet the necessities of her own physically crippled ordeal had led her to lay potentially psychically crippling bonds upon her children and husband. She could not tolerate the acknowledgment of pain or suffering. Her daughter, Patricia, had fought clear of her, but upon Stephen, in his time of crisis, his mother's contempt for a show of weakness had been devastating.

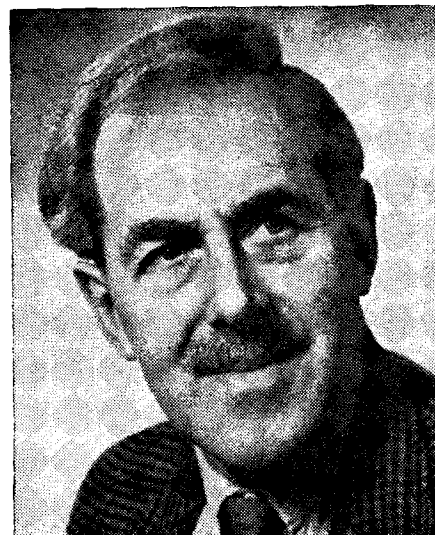
Before we are through Catherine has managed to obtain releases of different kinds not only for Stephen and Lawrence, but also for herself. The processes by which Mr. Hutchinson achieves this are founded on depth characterization and a rich understanding of human emotional entanglements.

"The Stepmother" is a novel of quiet containment, compared to the broader turbulence of his *"Elephant and Castle,"* but it should speak directly to many readers and serves to enlarge Hutchinson's body of consistently distinguished work.

Notes

LETTERS FROM A CONVERT: In *"The Bond and the Free"* (Houghton Mifflin, \$3) Charles Dunscomb uses the device of letters to retell by indirection the story of Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, and of the years of the young Church up to Nero's time. A young Roman woman, niece of Pilate's wife, writes to a friend in Rome of her experiences in the remote and strange land of the Jews. The events which she relates are at first impersonal and of merely exotic interest. By degrees, however, we observe her involvement in what she has witnessed and encountered, until we find her writing as a devoted Christian.

As a first novel, I believe, it shows authentic gifts and less than finished skill. Being notably brief, it makes several abrupt leaps in its chronology from which the story unquestionably suffers, and the letter form, unvaried



R. C. Hutchinson—"penetrating perception."

by any relief, even by a group of supposed recipients, becomes monotonous and thin.

Nevertheless, there are good moments in it. In spite of the relaxed modern idioms in which he couches Lavinia's letters Dr. Dunscomb creates effective scenes of ancient Judaea and the Roman rule. Real devotees of this quasi-Biblical narrative will be interested, and it is consistently on a superior level of taste, restraint, and intelligence. —E. F.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS: Monica Dickens has a depressing tale to tell about three daughters and their mother in *"The Winds of Heaven"* (Coward-McCann, \$3.50). With the death of the girls' father the mother, Louise, becomes the unwilling and unwanted ward of her offspring. She grows increasingly desperate until an equally depressing but kindly and gentle old man asks her to marry him. The novel ends with the daughters, after a catastrophe caused by their neglect and indifference, suddenly mortified by their behavior.

Monica Dickens has written eight novels and is the granddaughter of Charles Dickens. Neither the experience nor the heredity seems to have enabled her to produce exceptional work. Her characters are plausible enough, but the book is as sordid as her forebear's without his brutal social satire, relieving comic sense, or that vast compassion which moves us yet, a century after the situations he described have become archaic. There are a few scenes in *"The Winds of Heaven,"* at a seaside resort, that are exceptionally well done; everything flares into life, and our passions are engaged. But on the whole one can't care too much for these people; they are not so much good or wicked as dull. —DACHINE RAINER.