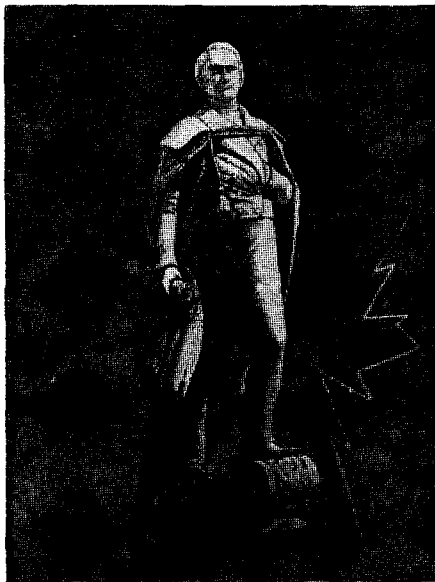


simply praising his actual qualities? Ward has found numerous incorrect statements about him, but it is true that he was a rough, hot-tempered child of Nature. He did have a strong will. And even an atheist surveying his career would be struck by the element of Providence (the atheist would call it luck) in his rise to fame. "I am fixed in my course as the Rocky mountain," Old Hickory once wrote. "Providence has a power over me, but frail mortals who worship Ball and the golden calf can have none." These words illustrate the reality behind the "image" of Jackson.

Ward often ignores the context of his evidence. Take the 1828 Presidential race. The Jackson spellbinders praised their man's lack of education, while the supporters of the cultured John Quincy Adams charged that Jackson was "unfit." Jackson won the election; from this Ward concludes that the folk disparaged learning. But does this follow? Compare 1828 with the recent "egghead" controversy. Stevenson was defeated, and intellect held in contempt, but would it be fair to say that Stevenson's brilliant and witty speeches cost him votes? Other factors were involved. To say that nineteenth-century America gloried in its ignorance is a half-truth. Ward forgets America's passion for public education, as powerful in Jackson's day as in our own.

Like most writers with a novel thesis, Ward overstates his case. Of course, Jackson was a symbol of his age. But that is not the whole truth, either about Jackson or the age. And Mr. Ward is very lucky that Old Hickory cannot know how a "frail mortal" has tried to reduce him to the status of a symbol.



—From "Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age."
Jackson as the S.S. Constitution figurehead.

You Are at Vicksburg

"The Web of Victory," by Earl Schenck Miers (Alfred A. Knopf, 320 pp. \$5), is a vivid re-creation of the crucial Vicksburg campaign as it appeared to one of its chief participants. General U. S. Grant. T. Harry Williams of Louisiana State University, who reviews it below, is the author of the currently published biography "Bureaugard: Napoleon in Gray."

By T. Harry Williams

IN TWO books about the Civil War, one dealing with the battle of Gettysburg and the other with Sherman's march to Atlanta, Earl Schenck Miers employed a historical technique that he has now carried to greater perfection in "The Web of Victory," which deals with U. S. Grant and the Vicksburg campaign. If Mr. Miers did not originate this particular methodology, at least he is its most prominent practitioner. It may well be described by a word in the publisher's blurb—"evocation." The idea is to take a short and dramatic segment of history that is dominated by a principal dramatic figure—Sherman, Grant—and study intensively the actions of the chief actor and his associates and how those actions affected everybody, big and small, in the situation under review. By concentrating on one episode and by producing as many witnesses as possible to depict the episode the writer evokes the mood of a tiny part of the past. Again to quote the publisher, this is the technique of an informed and gifted reporter. It is also the approach to history which has been used by radio and television. Mr. Miers's book is a published version of "You Are There."

"The Web of Victory" is concerned with three themes. The first is the emergence of Grant as a general prior to Vicksburg and the beginnings of the operations against the mighty fortress that controlled the Mississippi River line—a portrait of a general who had not as yet discovered the greatness within him. The second is the awakening of Grant's genius as he devised and directed the smashing campaign that lifted his army out of the swamps and bayous above Vicksburg to the high ground below it and that brought him to the very gates of

the city—a movement that is rightly ranked as one of the most brilliant in military annals. The third is the continued growth of Grant during the long, dull siege of forty-seven days—a period in which Grant showed that he possessed pertinacity as well as imagination.

Almost every person who had anything to do with Vicksburg and who left a record that Mr. Miers could locate gets into his story. All the big people are here: Lincoln, Grant, Halleck, Sherman, and others on the Union side, and for the Confederates Jefferson Davis, Joe Johnston, John C. Pemberton, and lesser luminaries. So are the little people: reporters, enlisted men, civilians in Vicksburg, and Negro refugees. And they all talk or write in lengthy quotes, for it is a part of Mr. Miers's technique to let his characters, as much as possible, create the "evocation." The result is something like a huge, detailed painting of the Vicksburg campaign—a canvas crowded with people and scenes and splashed in many colors. Many of the actors are pictured with rare vividness, particularly General John A. McClernand, the ambitious and obstreperous corps commander who gave Grant so much trouble before he was tossed out of the Army. Many of the scenes, especially the ones dealing with the reactions of humans to war, are depicted with rare insight and skill. But sometimes the very richness of the portrait becomes a fault. The author's descriptive prose and the ornate prose he quotes obscure clarity. The reviewer doubts that some of the accounts of pre-battle planning and of battles will mean much to readers not already familiar with the events.

THE Web of Victory" is an important addition to a recent important literature of the Civil War. For many years the impression was fixed in the history books that nearly all the Southern generals were daring, imaginative, superior officers who fought gallantly and skilfully and in the end succumbed only to great odds. Nearly all the Northern generals were magnificent incompetents or, at the best, plodding dullards who won only because they had overwhelming resources at their command. Assuming the facts to be true it was difficult to understand how the North won the

war or the South managed to lose it. Of course, the facts were not true. The North could not have won if its generals had been as bad as pictured. Victory is not achieved just on the basis of superiority in human and material assets. Somebody has to organize and direct the resources of a nation at war. There emerged in the North, in the persons of Grant, Sherman, Thomas, and others, a group of generals who were at least the equal of the best the South had to offer. They were one big reason the North won. This fact is now beginning to be realized, with the result that new studies of the Northern commanders, from a new perspective, have been undertaken. In this reappraisal, perhaps for some people an "agonizing" one, the chief attention of investigators has naturally been directed to Grant. The recent evaluations of Bruce Catton, K. P. Williams, and others, and now of Mr. Miers, added to the earlier works of General Fuller and Colonel Conger, should place Grant in his rightful military place: a great general, one who had faults and made mistakes, but, nevertheless, great.

A final word about Mr. Miers's technique. It has its merits and also its defects, the greatest of which is that the story has to stop before it is over, to cease, so to speak, in midair. It comes as a terrific letdown after finishing the great events at Vicksburg to learn that Grant welcomed the end of the war so that he could again lace his wife's shoes in the morning!

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 626**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 626 will be found in the next issue.

DQAHEHTE HT F JHCK

DW NPFGA TAHEXRFC—

ANP KHOHAFRHT

DW WFHRXGP.

PRMPGA NXMMFGK

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 625
Journalism is organized gossip.
—Edward Eggleston.*

FICTION

Coming of Age in the Golden City

"The Four Rivers of Paradise," by Helen C. White (Macmillan. 246 pp. \$3.50), is the story of the education of a young Christian nobleman at the time of the sack of Rome.

By Ben Ray Redman

EVEN now, after two world wars, it is possible to say that the sack of Rome by Alaric shocked the imagination of mankind as it has been shocked by no other event in recorded history. It is around this stupendous happening that Helen C. White has built her new novel, "The Four Rivers of Paradise."

Her tale begins in 404 A.D. when Hilary, a young Aquitanian nobleman, a Christian, and the heir to vast estates, arrives in Rome with the intention of seeing the City before settling down to the duties that will come to him with his patrimony. In Rome Hilary places himself under the protection of Symmachus, the great senator. It is a wise choice of patrons, both for Hilary and Miss White: for the one because Symmachus is a man of power and influence; for the other because "the circle of Symmachus"—in the words of Samuel Dill—"is better known to us than any other of that time," and provides the historical novelist with a comparative abundance of material.

The society in which Hilary finds himself is fascinating and complex. The conflict between paganism and Christianity has not yet been resolved. Indeed, despite imperial decrees designed to extirpate it, paganism is still alive and vigorous. Families are divided within themselves—in many the wife is a devout Christian, while the husband regards with wholesome respect the ancient gods who have done so well by Rome. But in many instances these divisions are provocative of surprisingly little bitterness. Symmachus himself, a pagan of the pagans and an eloquent defender of the old faith, lives on the best of terms with Christian friends. A momentary balance between old and new beliefs has been achieved, at least in the higher reaches of Roman society. But below them, of course, intolerance and hatred rage.

It is to those higher reaches that Miss White's hero belongs by birth,

and he begins by entering upon his birthright with assurance. But as he lives he learns, and "The Four Rivers of Paradise" might well have been sub-titled "The Education of Hilary of Bordeaux." It is an education that involves many teachers; not only Symmachus and his friends, not only pagan and Christian ladies, but Attis the dusky dancer, Stilicho and Stilicho's wife and daughter, Paulinus of Nola, Pope Innocent I, Jerome, Eustochium, Augustine—and Alaric. When these teachers have done their work Hilary knows what work is his to do in the world.

He is living with Jerome, in his monastery at Bethlehem, when Alaric enters Rome. He, and we, learn of the fall and rape of the city only at second hand, from successive waves of refugees. This may cause some readers to think that Miss White has dodged her big scene; but she may have gained rather than lost by removing Hilary from the vortex of the action.

And she was probably wise to bring us news of Stilicho's death, instead of making us witnesses of his betrayal and execution. There is much to be said for the device of the Greek tragic messenger. Had sensationalism been her object all would have been different; but she has shunned it, even when dealing with material that would easily lend itself to the most sensational treatment. Her style is restrained, decorous. There are fine passages in her novel, but no purple patches. There is much careful writing, but no straining after effects. The characters are drawn simply, without elaboration; and the reader is left to discover for himself whatever depths may lie beneath the surfaces.

That there is more conscientious workmanship than literary power in "The Four Rivers of Paradise" is, I am afraid, true. But the book merits hospitality and respect at a time when the historical novel has been so widely debased.

