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Books of The Times

STATINTL

The Story of a Dedicated Man

By ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

ON MAY 5, 1949, a gangly, gray-haired American checked into the Palace Hotel in Prague. His name was Noel Haviland Field. His reputation, slightly tarnished in some quarters, was nonetheless impressive. His future was uncertain.

Noel Field came from a distinguished Quaker family. He was known as able and honest to a fault, a devoted public servant for the betterment of mankind. He had worked in the State Department for disarmament, in the League of Nations for world peace, in Spain against the fascists. During and after World War II, he had given selfless aid to refugees as European director of the Unitarian Service Committee. If he was a little odd, a trifle earnest in his idealism—well, that came with dedication.



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The Communists knew him better, and when he arrived in Prague, they were frightened. On May 10, he posted a letter to his wife, Herta, in Geneva, then disappeared.

On Aug. 22, Noel's brother, Hermann Field, went to the Warsaw airport to board the plane for Prague, where he was to meet Herta, now searching for her husband. When the plane landed, Hermann was not on it. Four days later Herta also vanished. A year later, Noel's foster-daughter arrived in West Berlin, registered at a hotel, got on a subway train, and was gone.

Back home there were heated conjectures about what could have happened to the Fields. They were Communists who had defected. They were American spies who had been caught. It was the time of the Hiss trials, and Noel Field had been a friend of Alger Hiss. He had been an even closer friend of Laurence Duggan, who before he could fully testify had jumped or been pushed to his death from a Fifth Avenue office building.

Inquiries, then protests, went out from Washington to Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany—all to no avail. Some thought

Gradually the furor subsided. Noel Field's name occasionally cropped up in reports of the great purge trials that were shaking Eastern Europe, but at home this was scarcely noticed. Senator McCarthy had taken center stage; it was assumed the Fields were dead.

Then, in the fall of 1954, the Fields suddenly reappeared, released from prison—first Hermann in Warsaw, then Noel and Herta in Budapest. After recovering his health, Hermann Field came home (as did the adopted daughter, released in Moscow the following year). But Noel and Herta elected to remain in Hungary. They live there now, in a house provided by the government; they do not care to see reporters from the West.

The story of the Fields has never been fully told, and even today official information is strangely hard to come by. In researching for this haunting book, Flora Lewis—a distinguished correspondent who now reports from London for The Washington Post—received no more cooperation from the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. than she did from the police of Eastern Europe, or from the Fields themselves. Nevertheless, by dint of several years' hard digging through layers of fact and rumor, she has been able to piece together a monstrous but convincing tale of stupidity, coincidence and terror—and of a dedicated man who wanted too much to be used.

"Red Pawn" is first class reporting, well worth the reader's time. More than that, it is a record of one of the great upheavals of recent years. And how one man, by character flaw and accident, set the machine in motion. Noel Field's dedication was not to evil; it was corrupting all the same. In seeing this, in not mistaking him for just another villain, Flora Lewis has shed new light on a kind of moral bankruptcy that infected many people in our time.

End Papers

One of the most charming animal imps of the surrounding suburbs and countryside—and indeed of all the 49 continental states—is that ring-tailed masked burglar, the raccoon. Because he is usually nocturnal, he is not always too easily seen but garbage cans overturned in the night are frequently his handiwork and not always that of dogs.

Young wild raccoons can be taught to be hand-fed, especially on sweets and canned dog food, but some nature lovers trap them in harmless cage-like traps and turn them loose in distant woods so the rascals won't climb to the local nests of songbirds.

This book is by the author of *The World of the Beaver* and *The World of the White-Tailed Deer*. He is a professional writer, photographer and outdoors man. It will charm people who are charmed by nature. Its photos are the best of the Living World Books series edited by John K. Terres, former editor of *The Audubon Magazine*. —JOHN C. DEVLIN

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agent. Others insisted he was innocent, this good man who had done so much good work, the epitome of virtue victimized,