

Dr. & Mrs.

MEDICAL MEETING. By Mildred Walker. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 280 pp. \$3.

By EVELYN EATON

MILDRED WALKER has chosen for the theme of her eighth novel the courage-against-odds of everyday human beings and their everyday human wives engaged in the eternal struggle of trying to serve God while having to pay bills to Mammon.

The setting is a medical convention in Chicago, the characters doctors and their wives, but it might be any group of men and women drawn together by a mutual interest, a common past, stakes in a similar future, the natural desire to see what life has done to and for the others in the group.

Henry, Paul, Bill, Sam, and John interned together. They are well defined in their differences: easy-going, unambitious Bill, who drinks too much and rises to real heroism; Paul, full of compromise, self-love, and yet penetrating, sympathetic perception; John, who wants to get ahead by means of a crap game; Sam, whose wife divorced him for his single-minded devotion to his work, and Henry, who is obsessed by his desire to find a cure for tuberculosis.

Their wives, Liz, Kay, Alice, Charlotte, and the absent Rachel, have become intimate strangers whom the years have pulled apart. The convention is a turning point, a challenge, a beginning, or an ending to each one of these people in an intensely personal and lonely way.

All the subsidiary characters are alive; their stories are interesting and poignant, but the main threads of the book are woven round Dr. Henry Baker and his wife, Liz, who have left the town of Pomeroy, where he is assistant to the superintendent of a state sanitarium, a small job which he has accepted with all its irksome limitations, in order to be able to pursue his life work of research. He has come to this convention in a state of high hope and excitement, to read a paper which should make medical history. For, after twelve years of patient research, grinding work, and continuing hardship, he has at last brought his discovery of a mold which he believes may prove to be the cure for tuberculosis. The discovery has cost Liz as much as Henry in years of sacrifice.

It would spoil the suspense of the story to disclose exactly what takes place at the convention. Henry faces disaster and Liz makes a tragic dis-



—Yan.

Mildred Walker—"intimate strangers whom the years have pulled apart."



Paul Bowles—"fugitives from Freud [and] a pair of demented horrors."

covery. There is no one for Liz to turn to, not even Henry, at this moment of the severest test of their fourteen years of marriage. Now even their desire fails. "When they most needed to ease this day's anguish and frustration, their bodies too knew only frustration and they lay tense and hopelessly alone."

But it is not a defeat of the spirit, it is not a final capitulation for Henry and for Liz. Their courage and integrity leave a way open which the reader is free to believe they will accept. This is a moving, sincere, and convincing story, a regional novel like "Winter Wheat" in a sense. It deals with the triumph of integrity over the compromises and complexities of a small section of American life.

Sin & Sand

THE SHELTERING SKY. By Paul Bowles. New York: New Directions. 318 pp. \$2.75.

By NELSON ALGREN

SOMETHING had gone wrong with the Moresby marriage. Kit and Port had drifted apart: yet Port had a hunch that a jaunt about the Sahara might somehow close the gap. The notion might have worked out if, at the last moment and for reasons obscure to both, they hadn't asked Turner along.

Turner was Port's best friend, "so astonishingly handsome in his late Paramount way," so bland and self-contained and calculating that it comes as hardly any surprise at all that his chief problem in life should be the seduction of his best friend's wife.

And since all the boy has to work with is a twelve-hour train ride in a private compartment, five bottles of champagne, and a passive predisposition on Kit's part it comes as even less of a shock when he brings it off; the only shocking aspect of the affair being the fellow's prodigality with the champagne. A quart of "Blatz" would have wrapped up the package just as neatly and more economically.

Consequently Kit is forced to choose between living with a sense of tragic guilt or with an air of honesty watered down by ennui. Her preference leaves us wondering exactly what she has in mind when she proclaims of her husband, "I love him! I love him so!"

The sad fact is that our three fugitives from Freud are so preoccupied with boring each other stiff that, despite the deftness of Mr. Bowles's prose, the reader tends to go a bit on the nod himself. What rouses him is the advent of a pair of demented horrors, which considerably redeems the novel. Between Eric Lyle, a youthful wreck with a beard on his chin and a toadstool for a soul, and the monster who serves as his mother you'll find as precious a pair as you'd be likely to stumble over anywhere outside a Charles Addams cartoon. Yet the Lyles are actually closer to human shape than the Moresbys, for their motivations spring from more human stuff.

The Moresbys' motivations appear to stem only out of a sense of general uselessness, on or off the Sahara. "We've never managed, either one of us," Kit tells Port prophetically, "to get all the way into life. We're hanging on the outside for all we're worth,

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The Pearls of Publishing

Deserving Books of 1949: Part III

BALLOTS just tabulated in SRL's poll of publishers to unearth neglected but deserving books issued during 1949 add three novels and two historical works to the small group of volumes nominated more than once. They are: "The Witness," "Two Worlds and Their Ways," "Last of the Conquerors," "The Pilgrimage of Western Man," and "Napoleon: For and Against."

On the fifty-one ballots tabulated thus far, eighty-one different books have been named. A complete list of all books nominated by more than one publisher follows:

"The Golden Warrior," by Hope Muntz (Scribner) four votes.

"Guard of Honor," by James Gould Cozzens (Harcourt) three votes.

"Ceremony of Innocence," by Elizabeth Charlotte Webster (Harcourt) two votes.

"Last of the Conquerors," by William Gardner Smith (Farrar, Straus) two votes.

"The Man Who Carved Women from Wood," by Max White (Harper) two votes.

"Napoleon: For and Against," by Pieter Geyl (Yale) two votes.

"The Pilgrimage of Western Man," by Stringfellow Barr (Harcourt) two votes.

"Two Worlds and Their Ways," by I. Compton-Burnett (Knopf) two votes.

"The Twelve Seasons," by Joseph Wood Krutch (Viking) two votes.

"The Witness," by Jean Bloch-Michel (Pantheon) two votes.

As was explained in earlier reports on the balloting [SRL, Nov. 19, 26] we have invited leading publishers to nominate two deserving but insufficiently appreciated books issued during the past year—one published by their own house, one by another firm. The books need not have been "flops." They might have received excellent reviews and good sales, but still have failed for some reason to receive the public response they

merited. SRL will continue printing reports on the poll periodically until every publisher has had his say.

In the nominations printed below, the phrase "published by us" has been used to indicate the house with which the person making the nominations is associated.

—RAYMOND WALTERS, JR.

Published by us: "Strategic Air Power," by Stefan T. Possony, has not yet been reviewed in any important book-review medium, though published several months ago. This is the most comprehensive and detailed study of atomic and other bombing yet published in the United States. The readable information this book contains would have enabled any citizen to weigh the evidence given at the recent Navy-Air Force hearings and all other aspects of air power with an informed mind. Also, Dr. Possony's material on international forces outlines for the first time the great and practical difficulties of establishing such forces.

Published by Harcourt, Brace & Co.: It may seem strange to nominate as a neglected book a Pulitzer-Prize winner which undoubtedly had at least a sizable sale. In my opinion, however, "Guard of Honor," by James Gould Cozzens, is the one novel written in the past half-century that shows Army and Air Force people exactly as they are. If, with that thought in mind, a few hundred thousand others would read this major novel, the public understanding of Americans in uniform would be tremendously enhanced. JOSEPH I. GREENE, INFANTRY JOURNAL.

Published by us: "A Barbarian in Asia," by Henri Michaux, is one of the best books ever written about the East and the oriental mind. A recog-

nized classic in France. Had unanimously praiseful reviews in the better media in this country, but the book trade never got behind the book and shoved it down the customers' throats the way it deserved to be pushed. Those who read it—the customers, I mean—loved it, but the book trade seems to have an instinctive distrust of anything that is off the beaten track and makes its approach in an unconventional way.

Published by Alfred A. Knopf: "Two Worlds and Their Ways," by Ivy Compton-Burnett. Here is a novelist who really gives her readers something to chew on. There should be as large a public for Miss Compton-Burnett as there is for Henry James. Her work requires the same kind of attention and offers some of the same rewards. Her scope is less broad than that of James, but her humor is considerably more acute than his. She writes comedy of a high order.

JAMES LAUGHLIN,
NEW DIRECTIONS.

Published by us: "The Witness," by Jean Bloch-Michel, a first novel by a young Frenchman, tells, in small compass, one man's life, stripped to its essentials. Its central theme—the destructiveness of moral solitude—is of timely and universal interest. Though hailed by a majority of critics as an outstanding piece of sober, fine, and compelling writing, sales have not corresponded to our expectations.

Published by William Sloane Assoc.: A very beautifully and subtly written account of adolescent experience, which has lost nothing of its intensity by maturing in the cellar of memory is "Olivia," by Olivia. It combines fine writing with moving content, and is a thoroughly civilized book. What its actual sales figures are I do not know, but it seems to have missed the attention it deserves. KURT WOLFF, PANTHEON BOOKS, INC.

Published by us: "Stravinsky in the Theatre," edited by Minna Lederman, fell considerably below our sales expectations. We had every reason to hope for its success: 1) The editorial conception was sound—Stravinsky
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