

of them through a failure of his technique to draw their full meaning into his material. In view of the promise he has shown thus far, however, there is every reason to believe that he will eventually evolve the tools he needs.

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## A Jew and a Junker

*THE SORCERERS.* By Rudolph Kieve. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1949. 438 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

THIS is a novel about a Jew and a Junker during the last years of imperial Germany. Like the host of its predecessors, it tries to unearth, with the usual amount of hindsight, the roots of Nazism and, like some, to demonstrate the German-Jewish heterogeneity that was to write so cruel a chapter into our history.

The two protagonists are Albert Sulzberger, the son of a prosperous Rhenish Jewish grain merchant, and Herr Schuck, a Prussian landowner, who, having taken to drinking after the death of his young wife, has lost his property. He is offered a working partnership in a run-down rural estate by Albert's father and stoops to that collaboration with a Jew. Albert, who moves in at Boxheim Hof with Schuck—they raise sugar beets, a profitable business in those days—is a Westernized Jew, to be sure, quite unlike his wretched coreligionists the Prussian has met in the East. Herr Schuck likes him, but deep down in him there festers the inescapable bias.

Albert's conflict, on the other hand, starts with the arrival of a carload of Polish laborers of the sort Schuck and his like have always dealt with as chattel. Albert is nauseated by the attitude on which Schuck's methods rest, but, eager not to be despised as a cowardly Jew by a society he subconsciously admires, he also fights the softness which makes him recoil from those barbaric methods. That they incidentally give him wealth only aggravates his problem.

Dr. Kieve, whose first novel "The Sorcerers" is, is a practising psychiatrist. His professional experiences stand him in good stead wherever he is satisfied with telling the stories of human beings, which he does very well with a great many minor figures. As a social novelist and interpreter, he fails. Bent on conveying a message—"Man, Albert realized, cannot remain

human unless he is in possession of his dignity"—he allows his main characters to slip from his grasp and move in to the sphere of allegory, a procedure which has been the undoing of many a greater novelist.

Schuck, a fairly credible character in the beginning, assumes—especially in his relations to his second wife—more and more the features of a George Grosz drawing. He solves his problem by quitting the partnership with the slavedriver into which he has entered upon his father's death. His life overshadowed by a venereal disease, he grows to be a paragon of withdrawn, melancholy gentleness. He tries to establish his own values, and the reader soon finds himself in the midst of a typical German *Erziehungsroman*, complete with pages and pages of ruminating philosophizing and endless intellectual talk. Under that load, the background material cannot fail to elude the author's perception. While both the conventional Jewish household and life in Schuck's own mansion are depicted with a sure pen, the Heidelberg salon where Albert hobnobs with highbrows, and the World War I milieu, are contrived, wooden, and not very accurate.

## Fiction Notes

*THE FAMILY MEMBERS.* By Martin Yoseloff. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$2.75. Rock City, Iowa, is Mr. Yoseloff's novelized town. Adroitly and uncompromisingly, he makes it ours. The Lutheran Church, the embattled local chapter of the YMCA, the assumed goodness, the gossip and intolerance make up its tyranny. Into this community a child is born out of wedlock, fruit of innocent young passion. No scarlet letter, no expulsion, only the lonely facing up to the citizenry marks this travail. Baptized, received with love, the baby ultimately gets a last name and sin is expiated by an appropriate marriage.

Mr. Yoseloff approaches his original and sweet morality with a tender, somewhat tentative timidity. He writes with sympathy, with keen perception, and with a warm understanding of frustration. These yearning souls, so typical and so touching, can achieve salvation only through the simplest acts of living. The way is here pointed lovingly and with care.

*SANGAREE.* By Frank Slaughter. Doubleday, \$3. Dr. Slaughter, a physician, is pleased to look at life in emerging America just after the Revolution. The scene, in and around Savannah, is rich in slavery, crinolines, beaten biscuits, and feuds. Mis-



apprehensions, falsely smeared reputations, and unjustly tarnished bright honors are finally cleared up. The wildcat aristocratic heiress yields to an upstart young surgeon, her dying father's choice for her as husband as well as manager of her estates. New blood revitalizes blue blood.

An almost unbearably heavy operative schedule takes up Dr. Kent's professional time. Malignant throats, twisted hernias, false pregnancies, and infected mastoids mark this medical journal. Ignorance of anesthesia lends a sadistic touch to these scalpel-happy proceedings. Otherwise the tale is egregiously twice told.

*NO MAN ALONE.* By Edwin L. Mayer. Boni & Gaer. \$3. Mr. Mayer has essayed a novel in the manner of Steinbeck. Whether wittingly or not, the mark of imitation, of derivation is on it. Rough fibered, coarse, heavy with brawn, drunken brawls, easy sex, and brutal loyalties, the fundamental brotherhood of man actually sets the key. A binge, a jail sentence, and an enforced stay in Mexico involve an ideologically confused American truckdriver with a big beer baron, a native girl out for security, and a dumb half-caste out for the workers of the world. The right way is made clear at violent cost. America, still the land of promise, beckons across the border and readily receives her native son.

A mechanical precision, a pulsing sense of the machine controlled by man, and one unforgettable night ride contribute what excitement there is to this tale of toughness without tenderness.

*THIS SAME FLOWER.* By Jeannette Coveit Nolan. Appleton-Century-Crofts. \$2.75. How a carefully nurtured small-town girl breaks loose in 1911 with the expected results. A room of her own, a job involving the current suffrage movement, two men in her life, and a mounting feminine defiance culminating in bobbed hair lead only as always to the altar. The period is stressed. Morals and manners, while quaint and complicated, could be combated and invariably were for plot purposes. Patently passive, but agreeable, afternoon reading.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

# The Case of the Poisoned Compliments

DAVID DAVIDSON

THE other day, a long-standing friend of the knew-you-when variety informed me he had just got around to reading a published work of mine. "Kid," he declared, and I'm certain he meant this as pure praise, "I didn't know you had it in you! Think I'll try a novel myself one of these days."

Now, compliments are fine things, and the person who pretends he doesn't want them and doesn't look for them is, five to one, pretending to an other-worldliness that may have a lot to do with the parable of the sour grapes. But this is not to say that all compliments are cut from the same cloth.

The sad truth is that altogether too many of them come served up with the attractiveness and acceptability of, say, garnished ratbane or potassium cyanide with truffles. Not that the flatterer's intentions are necessarily bad. Perhaps it's only another tragic case of somebody sending you a gift basket of toadstools where he sincerely meant mushrooms.

The morsel of laudation hereinabove, for instance, I would classify as *The Compliment of Unflattering Surprise*. Into it, and quite unconsciously of course, has gone the imputation that it's nothing short of miraculous that a dope like myself should have succeeded in turning out a novel which is the least bit readable; that if I could do it, there can't be much to it; and that certainly the flatterer should himself be able to turn out a far better one.

Nor, as I leaf through my memory book, is this the sole instance of toadstools-for-mushrooms flattery. Off-hand I can tote up at least six other grand categories, and I list them below haphazardly rather than in order of frequency or detestability:

*The Compliment of Misfocussed Laudation*: Your intention, say, was to write a study of moral courage or the impact of present-day violences on sensitive people, but what the review comes out as is something like this: "Amazing! Probably no other novelist of our times has demonstrated so profound an understanding of Bavarian yodeling and chamois hunting. There are several interesting observations, incidentally, about human beings."

*The Compliment of the Inacceptable Criterion*: "Wonderful! As a work of art it comes up to 'The Miracle of the Bells'!"

*The Compliment of the Quick Pigeonhole and the Implied Plagiarism*: "Marvelous! It reminded me all the way through of 'The Red Badge of Courage'!"

*The Compliment of Embarrassing and Self-defeating Excess*: "What a grand book you've written. Breath-taking!" (Fine, so far.) "Beats Hemingway all hollow—I really mean that!" (A slight unsteadiness now sets in.) "And Faulkner and Hawthorne and Melville too!" (The unsteadiness gives way to a marked nausea.) "In fact, I don't know but what I'd say it was probably the best novel written by any American ever! Yes, I really mean that, I do!" (Oh, oh, oh. . . . There is nothing for it now but to send for the stomach pump.)

*The Compliment of Future Possibilities*: "A brilliant, dashing, enchanting, deeply-moving, highly-impressive first novel. Some day, we

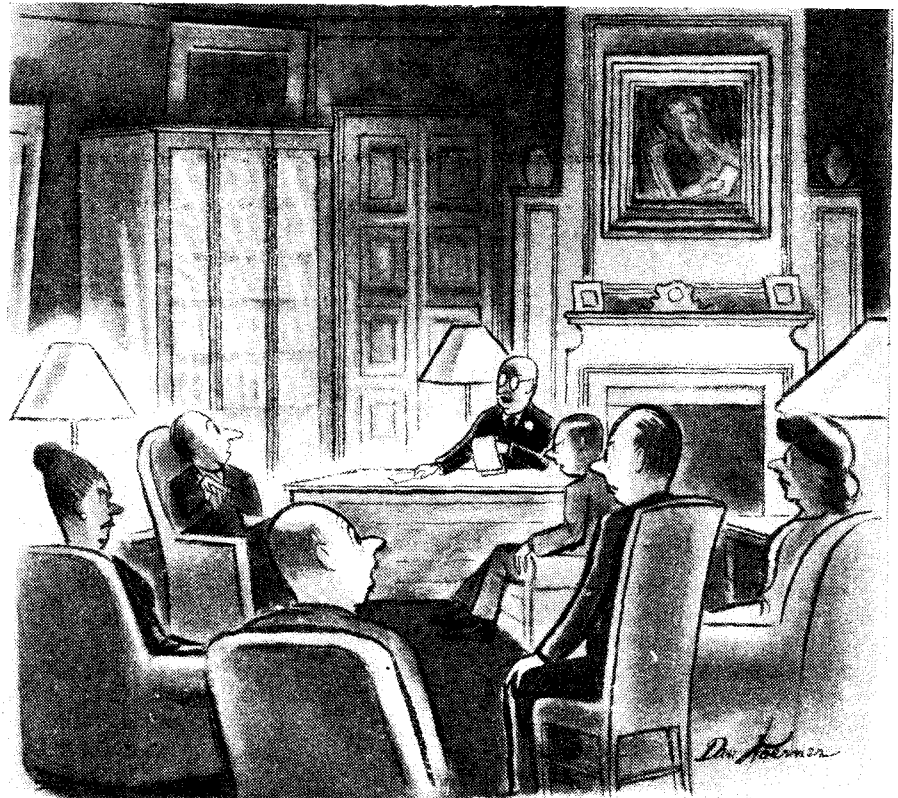
are confident, the author will write a good one."

*The Compliment of Past Performances*: "But that other book . . . your first novel . . . ah!"

Now, I don't want to leave the impression that all the chocolates which come the way of myself and my fellow workers are poisoned, and I hasten to add that the list of digestible and even highly-succulent flatteries must be equally large. I will leave them, however, for some other journeyman to elaborate, offering tribute here only to the one that has always struck me as best of all. It seems to come most often in short and wistful notes from people unknown to you who, in gentle self-effacement, write their names almost illegibly and rarely give return addresses. In these quiet little missives they tell you—as you would give your right arm to be told more often—that you have said for them some little thing that in their loneliness they thought that only they themselves felt, and always wished they could say but could not find the words for. And they wonder softly how you knew.

You get the feeling that it might be worth while to keep on trying after all.

David Davidson, whose first novel, *The Steeper Cliff*, made its appearance in 1947, is shortly to become the author of a second, *The Runaways*.



"I, William Basingstoke Goldbottom, being of sound mind and body, took great delight in spending every nickel I had before I kicked the bucket."