

ground fighters put up their last desperate resistance against the Nazi tanks, flame throwers, and heavy artillery, and the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto takes up the last quarter of "The Wall." In a way, this is the least successful part of the novel, perhaps because Mr. Hersey can't quite bring himself to describe the full extent of the Nazi terror. This was surely a nightmare world from its inception to the flaming inferno of its finale, and what "The Wall" lacks is just this final

sense of horror and evil. Its tone is almost too rational, fluid, delicate, and tender. Nevertheless, it is an urgent and remarkable novel on a grand scale, and one which seizes upon our minds and hearts.

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## Umbrian Mountain Miracle

JOURNEY TO A HIGH MOUNTAIN.

By James Wellard. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 280 pp. \$3.

By ANN F. WOLFE

IS A MIRACLE less a miracle because it endows a waterless community with an irrigation pump instead of an underground chapel? Don Cesare, parish priest of Sabina, did not think so. Sabina (pop. 750), a dusty hamlet high on an Umbrian mountain, was the home of a peasant woman whose "vision" had led to the erection of a shrine, the discovery of show-worthy caverns, and some fantastic exaggeration in Rome's *Messaggero*. From the parochial tumult and the peninsular shouting Don Cesare held himself aloof, something that could not be said of the less conservative newspapers in Europe and America. Correspondents, photographers, and radio broadcasters swarmed up Monte Rotundo, equipped with prodigious expense accounts and even more prodigious thirsts.

For Sabina, the expense accounts, the thirsts, and the nocturnal folkways of the visitors added up to prosperity and social cataclysm. As the journalists showered banknotes on the populace, the peasants abandoned their fields and shops, the rustic lads learned to shoot craps. To prolong the shower of foreign gold, certain leading Sabinites put a hoax over on the journalists. On the male of the species, that is. Helen Teela of New York's *Press*, she of the beautiful dorsal view and unlovely obverse, not only was not taken in, but craftily scooped her colleagues on the truth. To the fireworks of "rockets"—unpleasant telegrams from foreign editors—the correspondents trooped down from the demoralized hill town, leaving the Sabinites to their dust and their unfinished miracle.

Derek Trumbull carries us along to the unexpected finish of the story. It is through the eyes of the cynical English journalist that we see Sabina's miracle whole. Trumbull, ace corre-

spondent of Lord Burnside's *Daily News*, became a friend of Don Cesare, and through him learned that everyone lives by faith, even cynics whose "vision" is a front-page byline.

Mr. Wellard, an American correspondent resident in suburban Rome, handles his metaphysical theme with sensitiveness, compassion, and humor. He treats his peasants with affectionate respect, siding with them in their little cold war on the free representatives of the free press. To the latter he extends neither compassion nor mercy. From the lower depths of his association with newsmen he seems to have dredged up the most unappetizing types, ignorant, arrogant manglers of the fact and the foreign word. As they thrash about in the silken strands of Mr. Wellard's aristocratic prose, some of the figures appear recognizable. Could it be that in this highly entertaining book certain resemblances to the living are not purely coincidental?

The humor in "Journey to a High Mountain" ranges from Don Cesare's delicate philosophical irony to the Rabelaisian hilarity of Delmor Dingell's live broadcast. The broadcast was a farcical mess, and it couldn't happen to a more offensive ambassador of radio honky-tonkery. As for the part that the reviewer's home town plays in the miracle, it is hard to say whether Rochester, N. Y., should take a bow or listen for muffled laughter. Mr. Wellard's humor can get pretty subtle.

## Dream Boat

THE CAPTAIN'S LADY. By Basil Heatter. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 244 pp. \$2.50.

By CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN

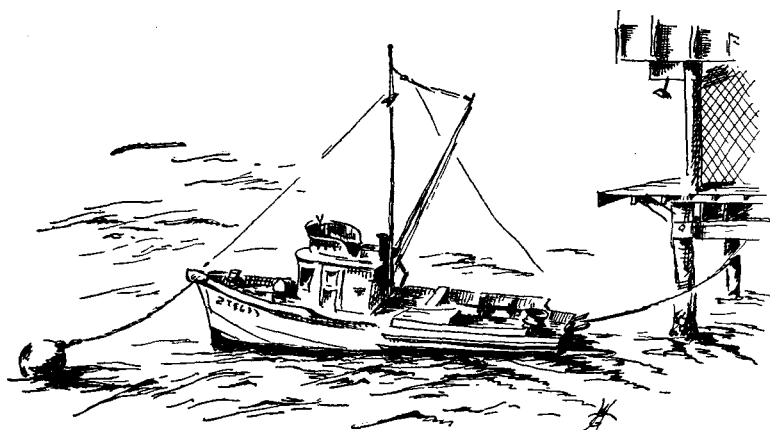
MR. HEATTER is pleased to pose that time-honored, perpetually perplexing question: why do men go to war? The answers are never easy. Nor are they ever final. There is much to be envied in the "happy few" point of view. But it remains rather rare. An increasingly "so what" attitude seems to sugar the bitter pill. In retrospect it simply doesn't add up.

"The Captain's Lady" treats the war in just that retrospect, making for an entirely objective point of view. The result is a terrible emptiness. No recruiting poster material here. No rallying round the flag, no ringing tag lines nor any tear-jerking sentimentality. And the only brutality to be found exists in the postwar world.

Shuttling from present-day Florida to combat in the South Pacific, Mr. Heatter states the case of Greg Cape. A bewildered civilian, Cape joins his brothers in arms, becoming so deeply attached to one that he promises, after all this, to join him in business. This business is to own and operate a fishing charter boat out of Longo, Florida. Choosing the name of their craft from a certain island lady who had shared her favors with each of them equally, the dreamers look to peace. When it comes only Cape is left. He buys a boat; he completes the plans to keep the dreams alive.

It proves a losing battle. The small town is evilly controlled by one ignorant, utterly intolerant racketeer. Law, monopoly, and force rest with him. Bucking this petty tyrant leads to violence, imprisonment, murder, and ultimately the destruction of "The Captain's Lady." Only a little love is left. Not quite enough.

This is a pointed fable, at once vigorous, concise, tough, humorous, and feeling. Mr. Heatter's honest plea for the achieved purpose of the conflict must find willing listeners.



The Saturday Review

## Hermit with Blacks

BEETLECREEK. By William Demby.  
New York: Rinehart & Co. 223 pp.  
\$2.50.

By EDMUND FULLER

BEETLECREEK is the name given a small Negro community hung on the flank of a larger white town in a region not precisely identified but which might be West Virginia. But if you think this is the wind-up for presenting another routine race novel you are mistaken. A story possessing a unique and original flavor of its own is offered us by William Demby, a new writer of distinct ability and quality. It succeeds remarkably well with certain delicate and difficult relationships, barely skirting sentimentality—the kind of thing Saroyan and Steinbeck sometimes have mangled horribly. But it has strength and range beyond this single aspect, as well.

By one of those unexpected but possible miracles of human change, old Bill Trapp, the white hermit who has lived in isolation in the midst of Beetlecreek for fifteen years, chips his shell and emerges into human warmth. His emergence is most heartwarming and amusing.

But human nature is such that sometimes a man's change for the better crystallizes suspicions and animosities in others that had lain dormant while the familiar pattern remained. So while some talk with admiring surprise of the renaissance of Bill Trapp, there are also those who are ready to say: "White man don't live around colored people unless he's wantin' somethin' from them or got somethin' up his sleeve." Perhaps, then, it was only a matter of time, inevitably, before the web is spun around poor old Bill Trapp much the way the skein of malice was woven in Lillian Hellman's "The Children's Hour." And this is the core of the book.

Bill Trapp is vividly realized, deeply conceived. There is fine work in the tracing of his lonely life, his carnival wanderings. There are a few moments, now and then, when Mr. Demby gets sloppy with him, but these are relatively unimportant in so generally excellent a characterization.

But the richness in the book's people is scarcely tapped. Among the Negroes are several unusual studies. The boy, Johnny Johnson, who shares the center of the stage with old Trapp, is created with beauty and understanding. One cannot forget quickly the recoil of his gentle and ethically sensitive nature from the cruelties and juvenile obscenities of the Gang. It



—De Antonis.

William Demby—"skein of malice."



Daphne Rooke—"velvet-glove puissance."

is terrible to see this nature—yielding to the fear of not "belonging"—succumb to their destructive vitality as the story mounts to its appalling climax.

David Diggs, Johnny's uncle, is another complex portrait, in his frustrating, tortured link with his wife, Mary. Altogether, there are a host of well-realized personalities: Tolley, the barber; Slim, the numbers man; various ladies of the church—more than I can enumerate.

At the end I feel that Mr. Demby, to some extent, has shirked his obligation to the reader, ducked out on his denouement at the critical moment, avoided showdowns which, if faced, might have magnified the book's stature immensely. This, however, is opinion. There exists a school to defend his choice. As it stands, it is a book of interesting and original qualities.

## Folks in Zululand

A GROVE OF FEVER TREES. By Daphne Rooke. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 246 pp. \$2.75.

By JOHN BARKHAM

ONE of the more unexpected manifestations on our literary scene in the past year or two has been the strange burgeoning of South African fiction. That a population no greater than that of the Borough of Brooklyn should have produced since the war such books as "Cry, the Beloved Country," "King of the Bastards," "Ceremony of Innocence," and others is in itself distinctly unusual. When it is remembered that English is the mother tongue of only half this population the fact becomes downright remarkable.

The role that America has played in this South African flowering is much more significant than is generally appreciated. In the past the few South African books deemed worthy of a world audience almost invariably made their appearance in England and rarely reached the United States. Now the process has been reversed. Publication is now first in the United States, then in England, and finally in South Africa itself. In part this may be attributed to South Africa's present tendency to look to the United States for guidance, but in part it is also symptomatic of America's growing influence in English-language publishing.

"A Grove of Fever Trees" is one of the better products of South Africa's literary resurgence. Written by a young unknown, it was entered in a South African novel contest and carried off the premier award jointly with Elizabeth Charlotte Webster's "Ceremony of Innocence." In the opinion of this reviewer, "A Grove of Fever Trees" can fully hold its own with the better-known Webster book. It is less ambitious, less subtle, less literary, less English, but it possesses more power, color, effective characterization, and sheer narrative force than that book. Above all, it is vastly more indigenous; the red blood that throbs in its veins is unmistakably South African.

"The Grove" is not a pleasant book. The family it tells of, the Ashburns, are as queer and unbalanced a group as has appeared in recent fiction. In this, perhaps, they are not unlike the place they live in, the Thornveld of Zululand, with its violent climate and its hothouse beauty. Danny, the "I" of the story, is a warped embodiment of malice who can kill a dog or his brother with equal indifference. His