

sive are "That Lovely Green Boat" by William Berge, "I'm Really Fine" by Stuart Schulberg, and "Evensong" by Daniel Waldron.

The general excellence of these and such stories as Wallace Stegner's "The Traveler," Harvey Swados's "The Letters," or Frank Rooney's "Cyclists' Raid" indicates that an increasingly large percentage of the best contemporary writing is being done in the field of the short story. It is difficult not to be encouraged highly by the discipline and skill these authors exhibit, by the variety and integrity of their stories, and by the happy absence of the freakish or the consciously arty or the phonily intellectual author or story.

It is as obvious as it is lamentable that the mass circulation magazine has very little to do with this renaissance of the American short story; the only slick magazine from which a story was selected is *Today's Woman*. Harper's, with four stories, heads the list of sources. *Mademoiselle*, *The New Yorker*, and *New-Story* are next, with three stories each, followed by *The Atlantic*, *Furioso*, *The Hudson Review*, and *Tomorrow* with two. The remainder originally appeared in such quarterlies as *Prairie Schooner*, *The New Mexico Quarterly*, or in magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* or *Town and Country*.

## When a Deed Is Damned

*THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE.* By Mary Deasy. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 365 pp. \$3.

By CID RICKETTS SUMNER

At a moment when the entire country is absorbed in political activity, this is a most timely book, and a definitely readable one, too. The political background here is not national; it is confined to one state in the upper South, but the situations depicted are equally true on a larger scale. Told in a straightforward, almost colloquial style, the story is written entirely from the viewpoint of Shane D'Urfey, a young newspaperman who is the observer as well as a participant in the action. This point of view is so well sustained that on closing the book, it is something of a shock to be reminded that the author is a woman. Mary Deasy evidently knows well the ramifications and the convolutions of politics in a state where, as she says, it is a hot subject fifty-two weeks out of the year. Those who complain of the indifference and apathy of the average citizen should remember that there are states, especially in the South, where this is true.

Although told by Shane, this is es-

entially the story of Leo Sanger, an engineer who has built many bridges but whose life-long ambition has been to throw one over the river near which he grew up, a bridge that would be more than a bridge—a man's life, something to stand forever against the sky. As Shane says, Leo could hypnotize a red Indian with talk of that bridge. He knew too, the old superstition that a bridge demands a life, and the legend that certain bridges cannot be completed until the builder has bought off the devil at a price of his own soul.

At the time when the building of this dream bridge seems assured to him, Leo has to make a choice between losing it and bribing the authorities who are out to sell the job and will do so—to inferior builders, too—unless Leo comes through with the cash. The disasters which follow—his son's death, his wife's increasing meanness, the loss of Charlie whom he loved and who loved him—and the effect of these things on Leo make up the main story of the book.

Shane has a story of his own, for he too was in love with Charlie, but this is subsidiary and one is less interested in his hopeless infatuation for her and his later consolation by Leo's lovely daughter, than in the tragedy of Leo himself, an honest man caught and helpless in the meshes of political dishonesty because of his dream and his very innocence. It has often been said that a woman has no respect for Law when it runs contrary to her determination to do or to get something for the man she loves. One of the best scenes in the book is where Charlie, otherwise a woman of integrity, sets out to get the bridge contract for Leo and reveals the extent of bribery and blackmail to which she means to go in order to get it for him.

Mary Deasy has an admirable understanding of all those delicate gradations between right and wrong, between integrity and compromise, for which our political setup offers endless opportunity. Her characters, numerous and for the most part credible, range between the two extremes. On the one hand there is Shane's Uncle Ritchie, the lieutenant governor, who looks like a mildly cynical bishop, is a man of unassailable honesty, wants nothing for himself and is therefore free, but completely powerless save for his ability to get himself reelected. At the other extreme is the other uncle, Ralph, who to save his own skin, tosses out honor and loyalty and allows Leo, his best friend to bear disgrace and ruin. This is a book which ought to be widely read.



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

### TOUSLED TITLES

Fannie Gross, of Asheville, North Carolina, offers twenty anagrammed titles of famous novels and plays and their authors. Each title is a complete sentence in its original form as well as in its nonsensical anagrammed state. Can you unsnarl them? Allowing five points for a title and author, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers on page 33.

- |                                       |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. "Fewer Tunes May Strain Sham Dame" | Yahudo Sullex    |
| 2. "Sour Slates Shine"                | Mengsean Whytier |
| 3. "Pennell Often Breeds Germ"        | Sonia Tola       |
| 4. "O Nanie Goat May Cough"           | Falmot Howes     |
| 5. "Ion Gun Hums Destiny"             | Gertie Trumanese |
| 6. "Bonay Wore Longer Skirt"          | Tish Tybtem      |
| 7. "I Nod to Showmen"                 | Constin Hebjek   |
| 8. "Tired Fran Bought Nylons"         | Rifersh Rychtop  |
| 9. "Prince Hath Ape Net"              | Wanlis Licrise   |
| 10. "Lawyers Wish Against Contempt"   | Maji Sanec       |
| 11. "My Hot Welded Sash Has Rolled"   | Siber Emaraj     |
| 12. "He Hinted Ring Test"             | Clifstet Dartzog |
| 13. "Ben Hath Hit Long Reels"         | Brother Osdrowe  |
| 14. "Hail Threatens Henly Route"      | Clarenc Crossulm |
| 15. "Annie Made His Tony Vest"        | Lirront Howdent  |
| 16. "She Practiced Her Boohs of Math" | Rita Halwelc     |
| 17. "Hilt Flung Tams"                 | Limmil Newsloy   |
| 18. "Kathay Hates Old Idea"           | Estelar Balcosle |
| 19. "Memoirs Cancel Bent Rogue"       | Lennie Goulee    |
| 20. "Veto Note Doesn't Tire Mail"     | Adlee Archers    |

## Twin Trouble

THE YEARS ARE EVEN. By Hobert D. Skidmore. New York: Random House. 342 pp. \$3.50.

By HARRISON SMITH

**E**VEN before the war enlarged the boundaries of contemporary literature the psychiatric novel had become one of its familiar ingredients. The crowded wards for mentally disturbed patients in civilian and in newly-built veterans' hospitals were there for anyone to see. In Hobert Skidmore's first book, "Valley of the Sky" he revealed a talent for telling a coherent story through the memories and the conversation of a bomber crew, revealing their lives from their childhood to their present dilemma. It was an old device but in this case an extremely effective one, for he was saying that their hatred of the enemy, their fear, and their bitterness at being separated from those they loved would vanish when they had fought their way through the war, whereas other writers were suggesting that the nation would be divided between those who had stayed at home and those who had been brutalized by war.

In "The Years Are Even" Mr. Skidmore uses the memories of two brothers who were inseparable until the war tore them apart. He gives his recital a new and terrifying dimension by making them identical twins. Cecil and Cyrus Derfey not only looked alike, they were alike; while they complemented each other, they thought and dreamed as one. Born of poor parents, they slept together until they were adolescent. Their mother alone was disturbed by the fact that they were set apart from other children, moving her family from the village where they were born to a town and then a city, in the vague hope that they might become like other boys. Sometimes they fought one another bitterly as if they knew they must break the chain that bound them together.

It was the war that separated them. Cecil, returning first, tried to find himself by staying away from his family. When Cyrus came back, he was sent to the psychiatric ward of a veterans' hospital. When he was freed, he decided to marry and was burned to death in the ruins of the small house he had laboriously rebuilt. Then the whole burden of the past rested on the shoulders of his bereft brother. Through his memories all the details of their youth lived again. Though he had attended the grim funeral his mind refused to bury his



—Marcus Blechman.

H. D. Skidmore—"complex narrative."

brother. He was somewhere waiting for him; he heard his voice in the night; he thought his brother's thoughts. His sense of irretrievable loss was balanced by his increasing hatred of the bond he could not break. An attempt at suicide failed; and when, in his pity for the girl who should have been his brother's wife, he offered himself as an identical substitute she turned in horror from him and called it incest.

Cecil was as much in love with an understanding and charming woman as half a man could be. Kathy had the sense to urge him to leave her and wander through the country so that he might somehow develop a single personality. In San Francisco he lived with a night-club dancer and her kindly brother who manages to understand the increasing confusion and distress of his mind. Actually, Cyrus had gone West to find Cecil. "Now he knew," Mr. Skidmore writes, "that there was no way he could move toward Cecil, and remain alive. He believed that there was an eternity so great and simple that it could not be easily grasped, an eternity which re-joined all that had been separated. Without belief there was only a deep sense of sin." Finally in his struggle with his sense of guilt for the unresolved fear of his brother his dementia reaches its climax, and he attempts to kill his friend. But Kathy is at hand, and he is finally saved.

Throughout this complex narrative, which is in essence a suspense story, the author manages to hold the fascinated interest of the reader. His philosophy that emerges is clear, though there may be more than one interpretation of its meaning. We are united by love, but as the bonds that hold us together increase in strength we try to break them.

## An Imperial Elder

CONFESSORS OF THE NAME. By Gladys Schmitt. New York: Dial Press 568 pp. \$3.95.

By EDMUND FULLER

**G**LADYS SCHMITT possesses one of the best talents among American fiction writers. She is not of the quick-turnover school, but produces works of size and substance, content to wait a span of years for the work to grow. In most respects "Confessors of the Name" conforms to her standard. Yet it has a certain lack which is bound to cause some disappointment.

The book is massive, powerful in its cumulative effect, and sound in its scholarship. It is rich in provocative parallels. It does bring to life with a wealth of detail the Rome of the third century—a period not overworked by recent novelists. The only work of any quality I can think of, dealing with the same Christian crisis, is Shaw's "Androcles and the Lion."

With all this solidity of achievement, this novel lacks something of the majesty, the music, the luminosity that gave the touch of greatness to her "David, the King," published in 1946. "Confessors of the Name" commands respect, and holds the interest, but it does not glow, does not inspire. Of any comparable works this Fall, it is most like Robert Reynolds's "The Sinner of Saint Ambrose," but again in comparison lacks the fire. Since it is so good, it is a pity that it misses this final, almost intangible quality. The Christians of this book do not kindle Miss Schmitt as did the prophets and kings of old Israel.

The novel presents the reign of the Emperor Decius, approximately A.D. 250. The farmer-soldier-emperor, the shadow of a Cincinnatus, wanted to revive the old Roman virtues in a decadent, polyglot empire. Through bad council in this effort, he was seduced into the first great organized persecution of Christians, as a potentially disloyal, supra-national group within the state. The test he applied was small in seeming but tragically large in meaning—a pinch of incense offered to the gods, or death. Shaw has set forth brilliantly the Roman bafflement at the obstinate Christian resistance to this apparently slight concession. Miss Schmitt sets forth the Christian conviction—principle against expediency.

The central actors in this drama are Favorinus Herrenius, patrician intellectual and nephew of the Emperor. He becomes a kind of brain-truster and speech-writer to old Decius, admiring the simplicity and integrity of