

One Man's Ruin

"The Day the Century Ended," by **Francis Irby Gwaltney** (Rinehart, 312 pp. \$3.50), is the story of a Southern farm boy's war with himself and the world during the war against Japan.

By Maxwell Geismar

THE WAR novels have not stopped. Perhaps the good ones are just beginning to be written, a decade after V-J day, when men have had time to contemplate their experiences. A short while ago there was Mario Puzo's "Dark Arena," which has had much less attention than it deserved. And now "The Day the Century Ended," Francis Irby Gwaltney's tale of the war on the Pacific islands, though written on a more popular level, and already slated for a film production, has some unusual things in it.

By a popular level, I mean that Mr. Gwaltney's narrative takes precedence over character and complexity of feeling. It is difficult to stop reading this novel, even though we realize that the central figures are rather typed, the writing is wooden at times, and the central story line seems, at the outset, almost quaint and old-fashioned. The hero comes from an upper-class segment of a small Southern town. (The cut-backs into his civilian life are sentimental, but done with warmth.) He belongs to a volunteer unit of the National Guard in which the amenities of caste and class are cherished. The commanding officer, Colonel Cozzens, is a relic of the Old

Confederacy: the share-croppers of Gray's Landing are the private soldiers, of course.

Mr. Gwaltney deliberately stresses the time lag between rural and urban American life; and what happens when this military unit is called up for active service in the Pacific is brutal. The central achievement of the novel is that of describing the full orbit of war experience upon a typical young boy—from the first moments of panic and self-conscious manhood to the last stages of moral and physical disintegration. And this is what engages our sympathy in the story, to the point of anxiety and horror. The central figure, Sam Gifford, sees his friends and relatives destroyed one by one. He learns to kill without mercy, even without thought; and when he begins to crack, he discovers how much a man has to endure simply to hold himself together.

It is now for Mr. Gwaltney's spokesman a war on all fronts—between himself and any other human being who threatens his thin hold on survival, and sanity. This is the experience which civilians have never been able quite to understand, and it is described here, with remarkable fidelity, against a background of jungle warfare and hand-to-hand combat that is enough to give any reader the shakes. Nor is that all, for the routines of regular army life are another form of savage guerilla existence. Sam Gifford ends up with a detachment of "broken" soldiers; soldiers who can no longer take the army discipline and are assigned to suicidal tasks under sadistic commanders.

"The Day the Century Ended" lies about half-way between serious works like "From Here to Eternity" or Ira Wolfert's "Act of Love" and something like "The Caine Mutiny." It is too bad that the group of surrounding characters in the novel are not fully developed; that the scenes in the story remain with us while the people do not; and that a curious kind of sentimentality surrounds the final vision of a writer who can be so deadly accurate elsewhere. I am not suggesting that Mr. Gwaltney abandon Hollywood for the Muse; but neither would I like to consign the felt and lived atmosphere of the Japanese war in this novel merely to the celluloid dream world.



Phyllis Bentley—"valid comment."

Rationalist's Life

"Noble in Reason," by **Phyllis Bentley** (Macmillan, 241 pp. \$3.50), is the record of a Yorkshireman's discovery of himself from schooldays to success as a novelist and playwright.

By Harvey Curtis Webster

CHRISTOPHER JARMYNE, a character in Phyllis Bentley's "Noble in Reason" who resembles his creator in almost everything but sex, says on the first page of the novel:

... in writing this record it is my plan to relate the events of my life as I saw them while I lived them; then to follow each with what I now see to be the whole truth. The difference between the two points of view is a tragic commentary on human misunderstanding.

On the last page, after he has told us how he has accommodated himself to old age, he says:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, says Hamlet. I shall try to justify this description of mankind as long as there is breath in my body; I hope that my last conscious moments will be occupied by this attempt rationally to comprehend, lovingly to compassionate, human destiny.

On the pages between Miss Bentley tells her extremely interesting and intelligent account of how a maladjusted sensitive boy learned to know himself and became a writer of distinction.

Primarily, the interest is not in the



—Sam Fausett.

F. I. Gwaltney—"sentimental warmth."

events but in the unusual treatment and interpretation of them. Christopher Jarmyne, like many who do and don't become writers, starts out thinking his father a cruel autocrat, his mother a sedate and dependable aristocrat, his brothers a difficulty, school an ordeal, his schoolmates bullies. Looking back with the greater understanding Freud and experience have brought to him, he realizes that his father was basically kind and his mother a not very intelligent dipsomaniac; that his brothers misunderstood him no more than he misunderstood them or than most brothers misunderstand each other; that his fragility, near-sightedness, and intelligence made him a natural object of his schoolmates' envy and scorn. The rest of his life—working for a bookseller in London, his ineffectual attempts to be useful in his father's weaving factory, his writing of bad and good novels and a fashionable play, his marriage—are analyzed with singular intelligence. He never adjusts completely but he does become useful, tolerant, a good husband and parent.

My description of the basic core of the book necessarily excludes too much. As Miss Bentley's readers

would expect there are fine descriptions of Yorkshire and Yorkshiremen, many valid comments on man's relation to himself, his society, and the universe. There is an excellent section about Yorkshire during the Depression and a chapter about English life during the disillusioned Twenties that is in place in the novel and would not be out of place in a book on contemporary British fiction.

Of course "Noble in Reason" is not flawless. Here, as in the best of her novels that have preceded it, Miss Bentley writes a bit stiltedly; she does not make you see, feel, smell the world as Conrad and Thomas Wolfe do; she does not move you as Joyce Cary and Graham Greene do. She is good not great, rewarding rather than compelling. Still, since this is the best novel to apply the insights of deep analysis I know except for Harvey Swados's "Out Went the Candle" and Nigel Balchin's "Mine Own Executioner," I prefer to make my demurs faint. Clearly better than the recent "House of Moreys," probably better than "Inheritance" and "A Modern Tragedy," Miss Bentley's "Noble in Reason" deserves even wider reading than her other novels, which have sold 125,000 copies in this country alone.

Out of Twilight

"The Young Lovers," by Julian Halevy (Simon & Schuster. 313 pp. \$3.50), chronicles the struggles of a group of youthful bohemians to get used to the adult world.

By James Kelly

WHERE the ways of the world are concerned, there's an inviting twilight zone between youth dream and adult knowledge. Julian Halevy, in his first novel, "The Young Lovers," accepts that invitation. The book draws its cast from members of Greenwich Village's young bohemia as they cope with life, love, sophomore year at college, the draft, and an extremely suspicious-looking adult society. You could call it a novel of ideas, since everybody here voices some significant ones sooner or later. You could call it a remarkably intuitive and poetic story of young romance from seed to fruit. And many readers will see in Eddie (the Groper) Slocum another one of these tragi-comic adolescents who battles the big imponderables with a questing mind and wild sense of humor. The Groper sums it up for himself: "I'm always stumbling around in the dark, looking for answers . . . I'm liable to exaggerate a little . . . All the things to believe in are gone, and I'm stuck with a feeling and no place to hang it."

The youngish author draws from life and (we are persuaded) personal experience. His people are shaped by the pounding they get from each other; first white-hot and malleable, then cooler and harder. Bemused by intellectual content and a free-flowing style which ranges easily from tenderness to horseplay, we almost forget that the image is clouded by Mr. Halevy's own perspiration. He tries too hard too many times to define the act of love, works too hard at elaborate comedy gimmicks, records too eloquent conversations. Instead of central suspense, he provides three or four climactic peaks, any one of which might have left the reader breathless and satisfied. It's a carefully laid smörgåsbord with some very good things.

Symbolically or not, "The Young Lovers" begins and ends in a subway. At the start, Eddie meets a nineteen-year-old art student, Pamela, when she asks directions to Coney Island. It develops that she is in a state of shock due to worry over an alcoholic mother, and Eddie timorously persuades her to come back to the loft he shares with a bright young



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

IS 20

Mr. e. e. cummings (who is not the composer of this puzzle) once did a book called "Is 5." This department now goes him 300 per cent better by offering twenty lines of iambic pentameter verse which have been chopped in half, more or less, with a uniting is omitted in every instance. The front halves are in Column One and the rear halves in Column Two (all mixed up, naturally). You are asked to put them back together. Then identify the authors, keying them on Column One. If you get no more than 24 of the 40 pieces of information sought, go stand in the corner; if from 25 through 30, go sit in the corner; if from 31 up, take a nice easy chair by the fireplace. Names of works cited are not included in scoring, but these are given with the answers on page 25.

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| 1. A little learning | () the fume of little hearts | () Burns |
| 2. A sonnet | () that doesn't love a wall | () Byron |
| 3. A thing of beauty | () quiet as a nun | () Emerson |
| 4. An aged man | () Ozymandias, king of kings | () Frost |
| 5. For Brutus | () on the wing, the poet says | () Gray |
| 6. For mockery | () like the trump of doom | () Johnson |
| 7. Full many a flower | () itself the soul | () Keats |
| 8. How charming | () its own excuse for being | () Longfellow |
| 9. My name | () in his chiefest height | () Milton |
| 10. Something there | () holier far than Rome | () Pope |
| 11. The best of life | () everywhere confessed | () E. A. Robinson |
| 12. The bird | () divine philosophy | () D. G. Rossetti |
| 13. The holy time | () but intoxication | () Santayana |
| 14. The perfect body | () but a paltry thing | () Shakespeare |
| 15. This English Thames | () born to blush unseen | () Shelley |
| 16. This mournful truth | () at an end | () Spenser |
| 17. This night his weekly moil | () an honorable man | () Tennyson |
| 18. Then Beauty | () a moment's monument | () Wilde |
| 19. This day the sun | () a joy forever | () Wordsworth |
| 20. Thy sacred song | () a dangerous thing | () Yeats |