

—From the jacket for *"The Disobedient Son."*

"... the struggle for the starkly simple goal of being let alone."

The Power That Didn't Corrupt

"The Disobedient Son," by **François Clément** (translated by Christopher Veiel. Little, Brown. 274 pp. \$3.50), is the story of a simple Mexican country boy who, through some time spent in the great world, becomes a leader without becoming corrupt.

By Oliver La Farge

OF LATE years North American and European writers have been increasingly interested in the problem of the Mexican character. Shedding the old, foolish stereotypes of knavery, poltroonery, and murderousness, they have tried to see into and expound the product of the blending of two strange sub-cultures: the old Mexican, that we usually think of as Aztec, and the late medieval Spanish. The latest to try his hand is François Clément, a Frenchman who has lived some time in Mexico.

Whether anyone but a Mexican, a more lucid and dispassionate (and better translated) Mariano Azuela, can do the ultimate job remains to be seen. However, there have been good tries, and M. Clément's *"The Disobedient Son"* is one of them. He has grasped what this reviewer takes to be an essential—that one cannot understand the Mexican's view of life unless one understands his view of death. (It may be, incidentally, that this is not merely a local situation, but a generalization we could apply in trying to understand many peoples.)

One of the advantages of the Mexican setting is that it enables a writer to produce a novel of character that is also full of action, in fact, in which character and action are often one. This book studies an unimportant

Mexican and his unimportant, dot-on-the-map village. It is primarily a character analysis of both with wider implications, but it is also and of necessity a tale of as many and as lively events as the cheapest adventure writing. It points the old moral that it is not necessary to throw good writing out of the window in order to have knives flash and lots of guns go bang-bang.

The story is built around the common device of the simple country boy whom fate projects into a greater world for a time, where he acquires the extra equipment of half-knowledge and material goods that cause him, returning home, to become a leader and shaper. Power once achieved carries its corruption, but in this case it never corrupts the obsidian, Mexican core.

The tour of wider experience is neatly handled here to give the reader some sense of the forces beyond the village that continuously play upon it—forces that Juanito, the hero, never sees as a whole pattern. This is unobtrusively done, without ever departing from the narration of a legitimate sequence of events. The reader's perception gives him a necessary background against which to place the struggle of Juanito and his people for the starkly simple goal of being let alone.

The opening pages of *"The Disobedient Son"* read like a pastoral, but the men are carrying weapons. In that there is a lot of Mexico. Pastoral with weapons could be said to be the nub of the book, of theme and events that lead to the quietly handled, terminal page of violence.

The Englishing by Christopher Veiel is so good the reader completely forgets he is reading translation.

History of an Emotion

"My Name Is Rose," by **Theodora Keogh** (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 223 pp. \$3.50), is a study of the disintegration of a Parisian woman.

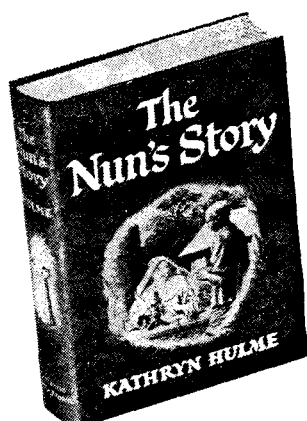
By Mary Barrett

THEODORA KEOGH'S *"My Name Is Rose"* deserves the same serious critical attention that was accorded her five earlier novels. For one thing, she has now developed a personal style of her own. Open the book and you hear it. For another, with great taste and simplicity she is attempting a short form not often attempted and too little appreciated in America. It is a form that relies on the swift stroke, on concision and brilliance; its power lies as much in what is not said as in what is. It has had any number of successes in French literature, and in England only recently it gave us that minor classic, Julia Strachey's *"Cheerful Weather for the Wedding."*

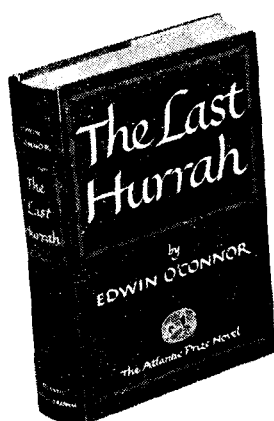
"My Name Is Rose" is told partly in the form of a journal and partly as a narrative. Its central figure is Rose Flamand, daughter of an expatriate American artist and a Jewish mother who was killed in a concentration camp. She is unhappy in her marriage to a French journalist, and her life is meaningless and disconnected, but in her blind self-examination she is more aware of her unhappiness than of its cause. The distracting uncertainty leaves Rose at the mercy of a chance encounter.

Basically a novel of this kind is the history of an emotion. The central figure is not a "character" in the usual sense, only a source through which we see and feel the impact of his world. Such a figure is seen as we see ourselves, from within, without outlines. But in order to create dramatic force the resisting world must be even more powerfully portrayed.

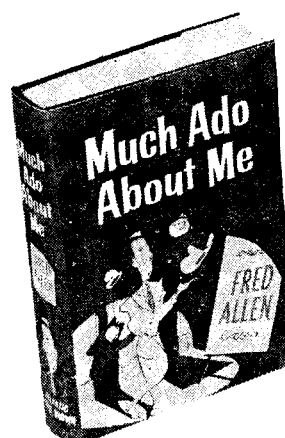
It is a pity that once outside the horizon of Rose's consciousness Miss Keogh is a little indistinct and too tentative to create the necessary other half of the novel—the forceful, sharply outlined cast whose pressure is the cause of the central effect. Pierre, the journalist husband, with his ready subservience to anything in power, even the latest fashion in ideas or women's wiles, is true in intention but neither compelling nor entirely original in the drawing. La Citale, the aging courtesan who lives at the top of the Flamand house, is perhaps too easily recognized as a literary



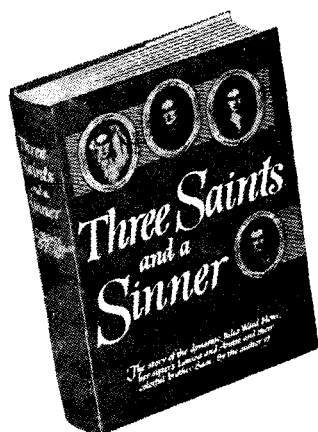
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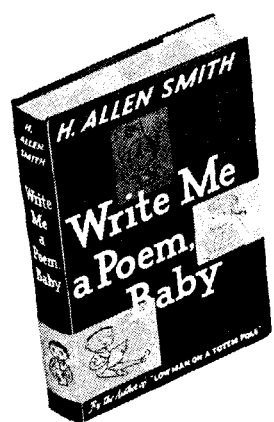
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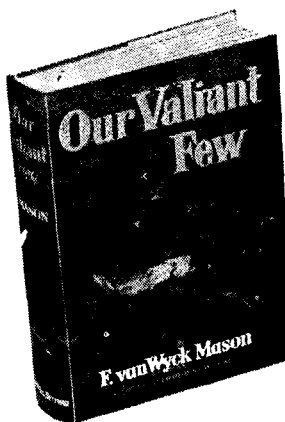
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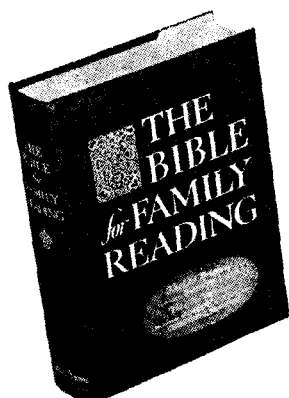
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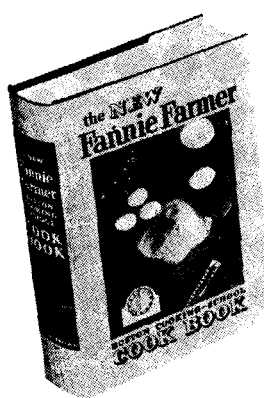
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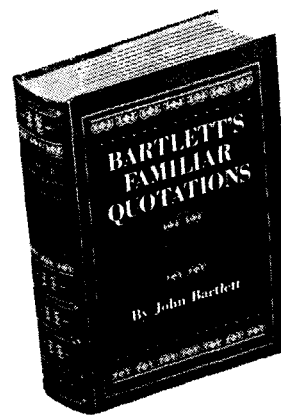
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