

Passion for Commerce

"The Mendelman Fire," by Wolf Mankowitz (Little, Brown. 191 pp. \$3.75), is a collection of short stories about Jews in London's East End and Czarist Russia.

By David Karp

THE title story of "The Mendelman Fire," a collection of stories by Wolf Mankowitz, the English writer, Wedgwood dealer, playwright, producer, etc., concerns the passion for commerce as personified by Morris Mendelman. In fact, the taste for business, the admiring appreciation for the stroke of merchandising, runs like a faintly connective thread throughout the bulk of the collection. "Nature's Way" details the accidental discovery of a new safe laxative—cheap to make and returning a nice profit per bottle. "Five Per Cent of Paradise" is an impious tale of stock-market juggling on the price of lots in Heaven and Hell, with a nice profit realized all around by both the owners of Heaven and Hell.

Mr. Mankowitz, the dealer in Wedgwood, was bound to draw upon his experiences as a dealer. This he has done in a charming fantasy about the day in 1960 when England is stripped clean of her antiques and "The Antique Dealers' Aid Society" is organized to take care of demented wretches suffering from "loss of vocation." But into this desperate moment steps the brilliant innovator, the creator of a new antique source, Morris Blottik. For further details, read "The Blottik Monopoly."

It is hard to discuss Mr. Mankowitz's collection without giving away too much, for many of the short stories are not short stories at all—but merely clever, or witty, or brilliant little ideas. It would be fair to say that most of the stories deal with Jews—but not Jews as victims, not Jews as brooding, unhappy legends—but Jews as perky, indestructible, vital, lively, and touching characters. Arthur Kober's Jews contained a share of dullards, or *schlimiehs*. Mr. Mankowitz deals with no *schlimiehs*. Even Simcha the Golem of the story "A Fool Is Essential" had the virtue of "shoulders [of] an ox," hands that "could straighten a horse-shoe." Ah, the daydreams of youth when that rarest of all human creatures, the Jewish fool, was a legend of strength!

Mr. Mankowitz looks upon the Jewish world of London's East End, of Czarist Russia with a kind, sentimental and myopic eye. Perhaps it is or was all that he says it is or was. Per-



—Tom Blau.

Wolf Mankowitz—"highly entertaining."

haps so. One wishes, sometimes, that he could fall into Mr. Mankowitz's bland good humor and expansive sentiment and while one reads "The Mendelman Fire and Other Stories" it is easy to do so. It is easy to believe that a Jewish pipe-maker in Czarist Russia could tell off a Russian noble. It is easy to believe that a patriarchal Jew might dispatch a bullying, insufferable peasant in a small Russian village and do it so cleverly that the police are not suspicious. It is even easy to believe that Czarist police might be fooled into thinking that a revolutionary relative was being buried when it was only a dead cat resting in the coffin. It is easy, because Mr. Mankowitz makes it seem so plausible in his series of tributes to the Jewish intelligence, the *élan vital* of the Jewish spirit. A highly entertaining collection if you will suspend your ruder, more pragmatic spirit.



—Peter Rossiter.

May Sarton—"civilized and profound."

Boston Excursion

"The Birth of a Grandfather," by May Sarton (Rinehart. 277 pp. \$3.75), is a story of two proper Bostonians, the strains of their married life and of their adjustment to them.

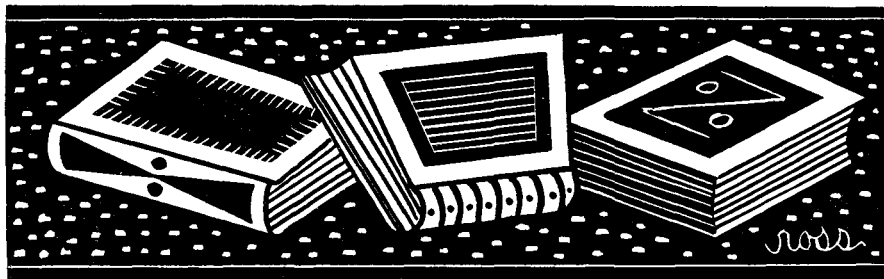
By Frances Keene

MAY SARTON'S "The Birth of a Grandfather" is, like all her work, civilized and unassumingly profound. Again her story's background is Boston, as "Shadow of a Man," a Boston any proper Bostonian, especially any Cantabrigian, would recognize. And again her characters are the gently-bred well-to-do who have somehow resisted the quick-money boys and the do-it-yourself faddists, people who have, therefore, escaped market fluctuations, excessive material avidity and who, because they call in a carpenter when a shelf needs mending, still have time to live out their lives in decent intellectual pursuits. These they take with seriousness but not without humor. Content with responsible rôles rather than tub-thumping leadership ("What's more tangible than influence?" Caleb says to his aging uncle in "The Birth of a Grandfather"), this little band of educated conservatives pulls far more than its own weight—and of course that weight is not exerted exclusively, though perhaps predominantly, in academic circles.

Miss Sarton's present excursion into this world introduces us to the Wyeths, a couple on the early side of middle age whose daughter marries, in the course of the book, and produces the offspring heralded in the title. Frances and Sprig (a deplorable name) have a union which, though firmly patterned by over a generation of habit, has somehow failed to absorb, to satisfy Sprig. His wife's acute awareness of the impermanence of adult love is quickened when her closest friend's twenty-year marriage breaks.

From then on, Frances goes through her routine as head of her husband's household, mother of two markedly independent young people, confidante of Wyeth's sister, general manager, hostess, conversationalist, cook, with the distracted near-heartbreak of someone who feels failure crowding her at every move. Cautiously, Frances seeks to discover the springs of Wyeth's torment, recognizing with him that they lie in his inability freely to give of himself even to someone he believes he loves.

Sprig learns, through the slow death of a beloved friend, something



about the nature of giving and he learns it just in time to achieve an understanding truce with his son, Caleb. Just as death has released Sprig's capacities for self-awareness, so birth will lead him into a belated maturity, presumably permitting the vital Frances a little of the peace her over-extended love and patience have merited.

The author has long considered the difficulty of achieving personal harmony through human relationships. All her books, and much of her poetry, have shown preoccupation with the growth of the personality, the ability or lack of it to communicate love, or, for that matter, to feel it in the first place, the acceptance of birth and death as cyclical parts of man's continuity. These are primary concerns, usually wrapped in the thunderclouds of *Sturm und Drang*. But Miss Sarton's style is quiet, her dialogue true and sure. She describes no scene 'folkloristically' yet each has abundant authentic detail. And her situations, though low-keyed, are basic, alive with their own kind of tension, drama, and suspense.

There is too little written about people like the Wyeths who mercifully continue to exist and to perform their specific needed function of leavening our otherwise pretty flat loaf. American novelists prefer a more spectacular regionalism or a ramble on the wild side, with no time for so much as a glance at certain of those who believe that "the guilt of unconsciousness [is] the only unforgivable sin." Miss Sarton, with the detachment of her Anglo-Belgian origin and with the perception her many years in Cambridge have given her, has just the right degree of insight for the task.

DULY NOTED: "The Boys," by George Sumner Albee (Ballantine, \$3.75), follows a quintet of grade-school and high-school friends as they learn about the opposite sex, operate some extra-income ventures, and taste life's bitterness and joy in the Los Angeles of some thirty-seven years ago. An uncommonly good, pert novel about the youngster's world and its complications.

"April Lady," by Georgette Heyer (Putnam, \$3.75), is a comedy of errors involving elderly Lord Cardross and his young wife who mistakes each other's marriage motives. The high and low life of England's Regency period are given a gay whirl by Miss Heyer, a specialist at this sort of thing. Her twenty-seventh novel is utterly feminine and best read with a side-dish of bonbons.

"The Best Short Stories of World War II," edited by Charles A. Fenton (Viking, \$5.95), represents a sampling of twenty authors who impressed the editor and a group of polled writers and critics. Shaw, Michener, Burns, and Newhouse rated tops in the poll. Their settings are starkly realistic,

their theme is predominantly "boy meets foreign girl," the keynote is loneliness, and their literary quality is high.

Good war stories are scarce, as demonstrated by the fact that many in this anthology were extracted from novels.

"The Moon by Night," by Joy Packer (Lippincott, \$3.95), tells how a young English nurse is lured to Africa through a pen-palship and finds love at the end of a dangerous trail. Miss Packer, author of the notable novel "Valley of the Vines," attends strictly to the business of giving readers a full measure of realistic adventure and mystery.

"Felembre," by Jens Larsen (Muhlenberg, \$3.50), is a picture of a dedicated medical missionary and his wife living in the African jungles. They encounter epidemics and report the social custom of a people whose witch doctor pours gin into the corpses of a tribal chief to administer a final stimulant to the spirit. The facts are autobiographical, the telling is warmly human, unsensational, and unpretentious.

—S. P. MANSTEN.

First Reader

By Larry Rubin

THIS is a boy.
This is a girl.
The boy's name is Peter.
The girl's name is Peggy.

- A. (1) What is the boy's name?
(2) What is the girl's name?
(3) How long did their names last?
(4) Draw what Peggy sees in the mirror.

Peter has a dog.
Peggy has a cat.
The dog's name is Rover.
The cat's name is Tags.

- B. (1) What is the dog's name?
(2) What is the cat's name?
(3) Can you find a clock in the picture?
(4) What time does it say?

Rover is gnawing a bone.
Tags is playing with yarn.
Rover is burying the bone.
Tags is tangled in the yarn.

- C. (1) Does Peter bury the bone?
(2) Where is Peter buried?
(3) Does Peggy play with the yarn?
(4) Where does Peggy play now?

- D. (1) Do you have a dog?
(2) Do you have a cat?
(3) When did you play last?
(4) Tell the class where you are buried.