

# Books of the Times

By ORVILLE PRESCOTT

**E**LEVEN and a half months ago, when the present year of doubtful grace was new and deep in record snows, there was one book about which "everybody" was talking. It was Ross Lockridge's huge, intermittently brilliant and frequently sophomoric "Raintree County." A little later the new book about which everyone talked a great deal more vociferously and much longer was "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," by Alfred C. Kinsey and his insatiably curious colleagues. Today there is no new book of similar usefulness as an opening conversational gambit. Everyone is still talking about "The Naked and the Dead," by Norman Mailer, which has been out seven months. And that's one way of looking at the literary year 1948.

Another way is to consider best-seller lists, which are polls of a sort and so to be suspected. When the year began "Come a Cavalier," by Frances Parkinson Keyes, was high on the lists. Today her new novel, "Dinner at Antoine's," is there. Many historical novels which were not noticed in this space continued to demonstrate the popular appeal of melodrama in fancy dress, Joshua Loth Liebman's "Peace of Mind" and Dale Carnegie's "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living" were read by hordes of troubled citizens; but there are no statistics showing how many found amelioration of their troubles in those books.

## Appraising the Year's Novels

Although there are other ways of considering the books of 1948, the rest of today's column is going to be personal and opinionated, a remembrance of books recently past and a reaffirmation of opinions. Much the best novel of the year, I think, was "Cry, The Beloved Country," by Alan Paton, a work of enduring importance, beautiful, touching, noble and generous. As long as injustice rouses pity and anger and as long as simple goodness inspires admiration there should be readers for Mr. Paton's masterpiece. Much the best novel by an American (Mr. Paton is a South African), I think, was "Guard of Honor," by James Gould Cozzens, a wise, witty, technically brilliant, utterly engrossing novel about various kinds of Americans involved in various kinds of crises at a great Army Air Force base in Florida.

Among the war novels "The Naked and the Dead" seemed to me the most impressive, a work of remarkable natural talent, in spite of its conspicuous faults and its author's immaturity and lack of artistic self-discipline. "The Young Lions," by Irwin Shaw, was also a war novel of great power and much creative skill, superb in its accounts of battle action, clumsy to ineptness in its handling of its feminine characters.

The other novels which I admired and enjoyed most were: "Charade," Edita Morris' beautiful parable about the issues of war; "A Candle for St. Jude," by Rumer Godden, a small but almost perfect study of the world of the ballet; "Bridie Steen," by Anne Crone, a distinguished first novel about religious bigotry in Ireland; "The Prevalence of Witches," by Aubrey Menen, an inspired satiric fantasy about India and ethics; and "Her-

self Surprise," by Joyce Cary, a deft and raffish comedy about an English cook and the weak men she tried to make happy.

Seven novels by gifted writers seemed to me, in spite of their undeniable merits, to have sufficiently grave faults, so that I could not join in the chorus of general acclaim which greeted them: "Other Voices, Other Rooms," by Truman Capote; "The Ides of March," by Thornton Wilder; "The Heart of the Matter," by Graham Greene; "Tomorrow Will Be Better," by Betty Smith; "The History of Nora Beckham," by Joseph Stanley Pennell; "Intruder in the Dust," by William Faulkner, and "Doctor Faustus," by Thomas Mann.

## General Showing Is Good

There were three unusually good American first novels in 1948: "The Time Is Noon," by Hiram Haydn; "Fire in the Morning," by Elizabeth Spencer, and "The Golden Net," by Ruby Redinger. There were three excellent historical novels: "The World Is Not Enough," by Zoe Oldenbourg; "The Corner That Held Them," by Sylvia Townsend Warner, and "Elizabeth, Captive Princess," by Margaret Irwin. There were three striking French novels: "World Without Visa," by Jean Malaquais; "The Transient Hour," by Marcel Aymé, and "The Plague," by Albert Camus.

Satire exploded noisily in this year's fiction: brilliantly in "Bullivant and the Lambs," by I. Compton-Burnett; vulgarly and amusingly in Evelyn Waugh's "The Loved One"; violently in a whole clutch of angry novels about New York which are already well forgotten.

This was the year of the three best and most important books of war memoirs yet published: "The Gathering Storm," by Winston Churchill; "Roosevelt and Hopkins," by Robert E. Sherwood, and "Crusade in Europe," by Dwight D. Eisenhower. Other contributions to history pressed close behind them: "On Active Service in Peace and War," by Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy; "The Memoirs of Cordell Hull"; "The Stillwell Papers"; "Jim Farley's Story" and "The Goebbels Diaries."

There were more good biographies than have appeared in a number of years: "Jefferson, The Virginian," by Dumas Malone; "Young Washington," by Douglas Southall Freeman; "Champlain," by Morris Bishop; "Two Quiet Lives," by Lord David Cecil; "Henry David Thoreau," by Joseph Wood Krutch, and "Nathaniel Hawthorne," by Randall Stewart.

This was the year in which two books on erosion and excess population scared the daylights out of thousands of readers: "Our Plundered Planet," by Fairfield Osborn, and "Road to Survival," by William Vogt. There were at least two excellent travel books (which have been scarce recently): "New Song in a Strange Land," Esther Warner's account of life in Liberia, and "In Search of South Africa," by H. V. Morton.

Due to a fallible memory, limitation of space and the worthy books I never read, this column is obviously incomplete. Nevertheless, it bears evidence, I believe, that 1948 was a good year for books.

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The Top 50 greatest fiction books of all time determined by 128 lists and articles from various critics, authors and experts. Some lists count more than others. I generally trust "best of all time" lists voted by authors and experts over user-generated lists. On the lists that are actually ranked, the book that is 1st counts a lot more than the book that's 100th. If you have any comments, suggestions, or corrections please feel free to e-mail me. Which book will be on your Christmas list? BRIDGEMAN IMAGES. Thousands and thousands of new titles have been published this year. The literary team at The Times has tried to make life simple for you by choosing 50 books, fiction and nonfiction, that we think you may enjoy. We hope you find something enjoyable. You can also follow the links, given below, to our longer roundups of novels, thrillers and nonfiction books. Let us know what your favourite books of the year are in the comment section at the end. FICTION. Olive, Again by Elizabeth Strout (Viking, 304pp, £14.99) Elizabeth Strout won the