

Civil War

Continued from page 15

limited themes, gave play to their literary talent and their genius for discerning the evocative human details. Williams, by contrast, dealing with a broader theme, holds his factual prose on a tight rein, and only occasionally does a flash of dry wit, pungent appraisal, or laconic eloquence break through to show the literary resources which he might deploy if he wished. His books, therefore, are not likely to enjoy the popular following that Freeman and Catton command. But his vast knowledge of the "Official Records," his critical eye for the lapses of many previous authors who are corrected in his footnotes, his incomparably accurate and detailed narrative make him an authority as commanding as any, and establish for him a place with Freeman and Catton as one of a great triumvirate of Civil War historians.

PICKETT'S MEN: As a combatant in the Nineteenth Virginia Infantry from

First Manassas to the end of the Civil War, William Nathaniel Wood saw his share of action, notably in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. He set down his recollections in the 1890s, and they were privately printed in book form in 1909. Bell Irvin Wiley of Emory University has now brought out a re-issue of "**Reminiscences of Big I**" (McCowat-Mercer Press, Jackson, Tenn., \$3.95) with a thoughtful introduction and appendix material on Wood's fellow men in gray.

"Big I" was apparently Wood's army nickname, but he does not seem vainglorious; rather, his account of his company, in which he became a junior officer, reflects deep feelings for the men he fought with. This is especially evident in Wood's narrative of Pickett's charge, a clear, searing account of bravery at its best and most costly.

Wood was a simple and vivid storyteller, without philosophical garnish. So he relates directly what happened on the march, in camp, in the trenches, and in battles. Professor Wiley deserves thanks for adding this memoir to the growing body of soldier-witness stories of the Civil War.

—ALDEN WHITMAN.

phasis upon battle reporting. T. Harry Williams liked it, calling it "a reporter's story of reporters."

LINCOLN'S FIFTH WHEEL. By William Quentin Maxwell. Longmans, Green. \$5. A political history of the U.S. Sanitary Commission in the Civil War. Richard N. Current described it as "a grim account of Samaritans at work."

THE DESOLATE SOUTH: 1865-1866. By John T. Trowbridge. Edited by Gordon Carroll. Duell, Sloan & Pearce. \$6. A new rendering of a Northerner's classic eyewitness report on the post-bellum South.

GRAY FOX: Robert E. Lee and the Civil War. By Burke Davis. Rinehart. \$6. Stanley F. Horn called this one-volume biography of the Confederate general "a well-presented picture of a great military leader."

ROBERT E. LEE. By Earl Schenck Miers. Knopf. \$2.50. T. Harry Williams says of this addition to the Great Lives in Brief Series, "the best biography available for the reader who is looking for an introduction to Lee."

SICKLES THE INCREDIBLE. By W. A. Swanberg. Scribner. \$6. The biography of an extraordinary rogue who was a general in the war. Earl Schenck Miers notes that Mr. Swanberg "understands this age, when villainy and heroism often came perilously close to being the same thing."

LINCOLN AND THE TOOLS OF WAR. By Robert V. Bruce. Bobbs-Merrill. \$5. A somewhat anecdotal account of the Civil War President's interest in gadgets with a military use. Richard N. Current says that Mr. Bruce has found "something new to say about Abraham Lincoln . . ."

MR. LINCOLN'S ADMIRALS. By Clarence Edward Macartney. Funk & Wagnalls. \$5. The maritime view of the conflict with many lively anecdotes, but, says Theodore Roscoe, "the seams of historicity show."

CIVIL WAR ON WESTERN WATERS. By Fletcher Pratt. Holt. \$3.50. The amphibious campaign of the Mississippi is the subject of careful research. Theodore Roscoe calls it "superior reading."

LINCOLN RECONSIDERED. By David Donald. Knopf. \$3. Nine essays concerned with the "mythical" Lincoln versus the "realistic" Lincoln. According to David M. Potter, "a genuinely brilliant answer."

SO FELL THE ANGELS. By Thomas Graham Belden and Marva Robins

A Year of the Civil War

A YEAR AGO this week *SR* asked the Civil War authority Benjamin P. Thomas to speculate a bit as to why his specialty was that season's largest and perhaps most popular literary category. "The Civil War was our supreme national experience," he suggested. "It tested our traditions. It forged our national character. It dedicated us irrevocably to the cause of freedom—everywhere and for all time."

One of the books reviewed in the issue in which Mr. Thomas wrote—MacKinlay Kantor's "Andersonville"—has remained high on the best-seller lists ever since. But in the intervening fifty-two weeks it has been offered competition by several dozen other Civil War books, some fiction but the large part of them fact, most of which have been duly reviewed in these columns. Nor is the end of the rush in sight; indeed, it seems likely to increase in volume as 1961, the centenary of the war's outbreak, approaches.

Below is a check list, not complete but certainly representative, of the better Civil War books published during the last twelvemonth.



THE MAN WHO ELECTED LINCOLN. By Jay Monaghan. Bobbs-Merrill. \$4.50. Charles H. Ray, the editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, which took an important part in building Lincoln's political reputation, is the subject of this biography. Unfortunately, David M. Potter notes, "never does [Ray] emerge . . . as a three-dimensional person."

THE HORSE SOLDIERS. By Harold Sinclair. Harper. \$3.95. A tale of high adventure about the heroes who rode across Mississippi in Ben Grierson's

cavalry. Earl Schenck Miers says it "deserves a place in the first rank of recent American historical fiction."

LINCOLN'S SONS. By Ruth Painter Randall. Little, Brown. \$5. The first book-length account of the Civil War President's four boys—but, says Harry E. Pratt, "there is much yet to be gleaned from sources barely tapped."

YANKEE REPORTERS, 1861-1865. By Emmet Crozier. Oxford University Press. \$6. An account of Northern journalism during the Civil War with the em-

Fiction

Continued from page 17

Belden. Little, Brown. \$5. The story of Salmon P. Chase, the Civil War Treasury Secretary who wanted to be President, and of his strong-minded daughter, Kate. David M. Potter called it "one of the most striking American biographical studies in recent years."

QUANTRILL AND THE BORDER WARS. By William Elsey Connelley. Pageant. \$7.50. The sensational exploits of the Confederate guerrilla chieftain whose Kansas and Missouri raids have become a legend. Hal Bridges places this in "a bygone school of theatrical antiquarianism."

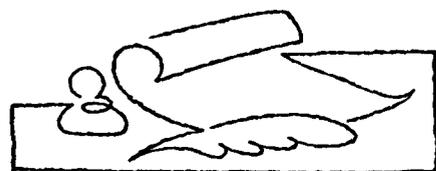
GRAY GHOSTS AND REBEL RAIDERS. By Virgil Carrington Jones. Holt. \$4.50. The derring-do of Confederate rangers behind Union lines. Of it Robert S. Henry says "an absorbing yarn of daring adventure."

REBEL BOAST. By Manly Wade Wellman. Holt. \$3.95. The story of five North Carolina farmboys and their part in the war. Burke Davis described it as "an arrestingly original book."

SOUTH AFTER GETTYSBURG: Letters of Cornelia Hancock 1863-1868. Edited by Henrietta Stratton Jaquette. Crowell. \$4. The Quaker lady who taught freedmen after the Civil War had "the eye of a first-rate reporter," notes Alden Whitman.

LINCOLN'S CHOICE. By J. O. Buckeridge. Stackpole. \$5. The importance of the seven-shot repeater, the invention of Christopher Spencer, is the subject of more Civil War research. Alden Whitman writes "Mr. Buckeridge faults his case by overstating it."

TO BE PUBLISHED LATER THIS FALL: "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," edited by Ned Bradford. Appleton-Century-Crofts. \$8.95. . . . "The Civil War," edited by Otto Eisenschiml, Ralph Newman and E. B. Long. Grosset & Dunlap. 2 vols. \$10. . . . "The Sable Arm," by Dudley Taylor Cornish. Longmans, Green. \$6. . . . "Rebel Brass: The Confederate Command System," by Frank Vandiver. Louisiana State University Press. \$3. . . . "The Decisive Battle of Nashville," by Stanley F. Horn. Louisiana State University Press. \$3. . . . "Sherman's March Through the Carolinas," by John G. Barrett. University of North Carolina Press. \$6.



emerges from the category of gifted beginner and assumes the stature of one of the most distinguished younger contemporary writers.

Man in the Shadow

"Malone Dies," by Samuel Beckett (Grove Press. 120 pp. Paperbound, \$1.25), is a short, cryptic novel by the author of "Waiting for Godot."

By Jerome Stone

THOSE who found themselves mystified by last season's play "Waiting for Godot" are likely to have the same reaction to a new book by its unrelentingly experimentalist author Samuel Beckett, Irish by birth, French by adoption. But like the play, this new novel "Malone Dies"—short, dense, cryptic—offers its rewards as well as its mystifications.

In bed, in a room barren but for a few worthless and broken possessions which he retrieves or pushes from him with a crooked stick, Malone, alone, lies dying. The room may be in an asylum of some sort, or perhaps just a house, abandoned except for a withered arm which pushes his food through the doorway; Malone doesn't know, for his excruciatingly acute brute self-awareness is matched only by his determined oblivion to the world (if there is one) around him. Too withdrawn from life even to await its ending with anything but a weak and fitful curiosity, he amuses himself by writing a story about an abject wretch who resembles him. He frequently interrupts it, sometimes in disgust or boredom, sometimes to report minutely on his own decomposing state of affairs, both internal (he becomes deaf to certain sounds) and external (food is no longer proffered him, and he drops his grappling stick, thus losing touch with his possessions). But he always returns to the tale, often leaving huge gaps in its narrative continuity, until at last it comes to a kind of climax, potent in its awful symbolism, involving a group of madmen on a bloody picnic. Then it ends, in mid-breath, as Malone parts company with life, and as author Beckett parts company with Malone.

Actually Beckett has never parted company with Malone. Whether he is named Malone, Murphy, Watt, or Molloy (as he has been in other of

Beckett's novels) he is only another version of one protagonist: the hermetically self-sealed solipsist whose mind, in mad lucidity, gnaws away like a galvanized mouse at the trivial underpinnings of man's logical existence, until the whole superstructure of the world of human dignity is reduced to a tissue of nihilistic absurdity.

It is easy to "refute" Beckett, to reassure oneself (thank God) that this isn't the way things are at all. But Beckett happens to be a master stylist, whose words are assigned their values with almost mathematical precision, and whose total meaning is something far more complex than simply a statement of deep negation shot through (perhaps because it is beyond despair) with a wild Irish humor. Sometimes as we watch his characters wandering through the vivid darkness, their brains clicking like Geiger counters, yet lost even among the simplest categories of space and time, we catch some fragment of ourselves in a gesture of shivering acquiescence. It is then that we slam the book shut in half-fearful impatience and disgust, which is exactly what Mr. Beckett wants of us.

This happens when Beckett's at his best, which he is oftener in "Molloy," published a few months ago by the same press, than in the present book. But "Malone Dies" is still sheer Beckett, and there is no one quite like him, which is probably just as well.

DIRTY WORK IN THE D. A.'S OFFICE: In his novel "The Prosecutor" (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50), Justice Bernard Botein dissects the District Attorney's Office of New York County through the story of Edgar Bailey, brilliant, ambitious, unscrupulous, a cold-blooded careerist who rockets to headlines by ruthless manipulation of the powers entrusted to him by law. Under the loose line of authority of the pre-Repeal era, Bailey is able to crucify the innocent, protect the guilty, betray his colleagues, steal their cases, hypocritically develop a crusader's reputation, and ultimately threaten his exemplary, forbearing chief. Fortunately when the governor orders an investigation of the district attorney's office the dastardly Edgar gets his comeuppance.

To strike the note of authenticity Justice Botein has gone back to his own experiences when with a group of brilliant colleagues he labored in that colorful vineyard. The discerning eye will pick up personalities of that era, including (as a guess) Jimmy Hines, Samuel Seabury, Ferdinand Pecora, and a score of legendary others. It is all fiction but one