

The new America in its underground fortresses, its elaborate security measures and above all the submarine itself are described with splendid visual realism. The captain's built-in electronic device will terrify even those who kept themselves from pining at Orwell's inventions of 1984.

The book is no less successful at the human level. The clash of temperaments and the mounting suspicions and fears in the claustrophobic world of a four-man submarine is all extremely well conveyed. It is in fact this psychological subtlety which imposed such unity and distinction on this starkly realistic novel. It will certainly commend itself to the imaginative reader for all these reasons.

Six Months Ahead . . .

Trouble with Lichen by John Wyncham

(Michael Joseph 13s 6d; SFBC 5s 6d)

WHEN Francis Saxover makes his great discovery—a discovery which could offer mankind one of its age-old dreams, but only at a price—he sorely needs someone to advise him. Should he spring it on an unsuspecting world? or should he suppress it along with all the benefits it could bring his fellows? After several years spent vacillating between his Seylla and Charybdis, Francis meets a firm young lady who takes the decision right out of his hands. Whether her decisiveness is justified is another matter.

'If even a tenth of science fiction were as good, we should be in clover,' KINGSLEY AMIS.

'... on all levels *Trouble with Lichen* is Wyncham's best book to date.' *Books and Bookmen*.

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS **A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ** by Walter Miller

(Weidenfeld & Nicolson 16s; SFBC 5s 6d)

THE SEPTEMBER CHOICE IS
THE DRAGON IN THE SEA
by Frank Herbert

(Gollancz 13s 6d; SFBC 5s 6d)

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ

by WALTER MILLER

This is a great deal more than science fiction as conventionally understood, for Walter Miller is not really concerned with the future at all, but with contemporary events brought to their logical if hair-raising conclusions, rather on the lines of *Brave New World* or 1984. But the similarity ends there. The setting, the style and the characters of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* startle the reader out of his composure from the very first sentence. What is this? A mixture of post H-War atrocity with what at first seems merely a description of religious discipline in a Catholic monastery? Slowly the picture emerges; this is no ordinary monastery but one set up in the Dark Ages after the Great Nuclear War, to preserve some remnants of the old knowledge of mankind. Here, by candlelight, the brothers copy and illuminate scientific documents that pathetically they do not understand. Leibowitz, a scientist who helped to start the war, but who recanted before he died, is now the saint whom they all revere as the founder of their community. Ironically enough, however, the complexities of his discoveries are gradually unravelled by the monks, who manage first to generate their own electricity, and at length possess the power to spark off yet another Holocaust. The wheel has turned full circle, the 'Memorabilia', salvaged from the Age of Simplicity (when men tried to destroy everything that had led to their downfall), and a great deal more as well) and treasured so zealously for centuries by the monks, harbour the old evils. It is not only the world outside the community, where mutants precariously survive, and gangs of robbers continue to threaten the peace, that is tainted by the past. 'The books', one of the monks is told, 'were written by children of the world and you had no business meddling with them in the first place.'

What then is the place of the Church in the modern world? for this is surely the wider issue which is at stake. The book's ending shows it is still a vital role, for there is still goodness to cherish in a world where technicians are capable of holding ruthless sway. As the world shatters round them the remaining monks take a handful of children and fly off into space, to begin again.

This is an amazingly inventive book, but at the same time one that is deeply thoughtful. It is funny, it is horrifying, it is odd. The characters live in a sort of superhuman, mystical way, yet are at the same time immensely ordinary in their reactions to events. The moral that underlies it is, I think, summed up very well in this interchange between two of the characters, talking about the first H-War:

'How can a great, wise civilization have destroyed itself so completely?'