

BOOK RECORD

Conducted by ANTAR

ENGLAND—A.D. 1950

A Shocker That Shocks and
Throws Some Shrewdly Aimed
Mud at Mankind For Good
Measure

I CAN recall having read only two recent novels of the "scientific fantasy" class that repay the effort of wading through masses of improbabilities. The first was Aldous Huxley's magnificent satire "Brave New World," and the second Andrew Marvell's magnificent shocker, "Minimum Man."

But before you are misled by enthusiasm I must admit I tried out "Minimum Man" on a girl who normally enjoys shockers, and she said: "I didn't like it. It was too creepy. But, anyway, I learned the meaning of the word 'asexual'!"

Which is as good a comment as any. Readers who are fond of expurgated murders and pretty love stories are hereby warned off. "Minimum Man" should be read only by people unlikely to get nightmares from their reading; and by people who have no rooted objection to having unpleasantly true remarks made about the stupidity of human nature and human institutions. All in all, the book is about the most skillful blend of sensationalism and slick cynicism I have yet come across.

First Novel?

The conservative Gollancz dust-cover tells us nothing about Author Marvell. I find it hard to believe it is a first novel, but if so, Author Marvell can count on 10 per cent. of my S/G when he publishes his next book. "Minimum Man" is told with the adroit literary worthiness of a Buchanan and the speed and clarity of a "Sapper."

The story is set in the year 1950. England has suffered a Fascist revolution and is rotting merrily along under the thumb of Dictator Jellaby, an anglicised version of Hitler—a cross between "Jix," Oswald Mosley, and Hore-Belisha.

Shortly after the revolution a Fleet Street journalist named Swan stumbles by accident on traces of a colony of biological freaks in Wales—foot-high, hairy human beings who, in the process of deviating from their species, have inherited all that is useful of human intelligence (plus a few refinements such as telepathic communication and a 10-week gestation period), and have shed all traces of inherited prejudice and handicapping emotions. Swan follows their fortunes to the end.

This, you say, all sounds highly improbable. Apparently, after all, "Mini-

um Man" is just another of "those stories. . . ." I assure you you're wrong. Mr. Marvell makes it all seem highly possible—almost, in fact, probable. Few of his readers will be biologists enough to poke fingers through the reasoning of the story.

And then?

Minimum Man proceeds to put into use all his advantages. One is at first repelled by his freakishness, terrified by his amorality. Then, with consummate skill, the author proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of this new species. Minimum Man is just about as far ahead of Maximum Man as Maximum Man was ahead of the greater anthropoids. You end up by admiring Minimum Man wholeheartedly and saying unhappily to yourself that it is time these bumbling, irrational, decadent humans were out of the way.

A nice piece of work, that, Mr. Marvell! I did not suspect you would ever induce a spark of sympathy for your strange little creations, but you end up by making everyone wholeheartedly glad of Jellaby's downfall and wholeheartedly glad that Minimum Man won his fight for survival.

Incidentally, this fantastic, blood-thirsty and almost too-highly-exciting story gets rid of some shrewd satire on the side. I refuse to believe that satire was the mainspring of the book because, for all the fact that man's failings are nicely stated, there is little originality and less philosophical depth in Mr. Marvell's observations. There is just enough second-hand philosophy in the book to make it palatable for educated readers. Here, however, is a good sample of the slick whip-cracking that will leaven interest in a tense and dramatically knit tale.

Mankind Tricked

Says Swan, discussing humanity with a Minimum Woman:—

"Nature postulated in human beings a profound distaste for reproducing themselves. Nature seems to have said at the beginning: these humans will not find life so well worth living that they will wish to perpetuate it. So they must be trapped by subtle devices into begetting children. They must be bribed with special pleasure mechanisms in the nerves, the ordinary reasoning processes must be atrophied, their brains must be twisted and pulped and mashed into submission. The process of



ANDREW MARVELL

. . . A magnificent shocker.

reproduction is divorced of all reason and is to a man looking at it objectively, a distasteful fraud of the most blatant kind."

And I do appreciate Mr. Marvell's treatment of the Popular Press. I hazard the guess he is himself a journalist. Surely no one but a journalist could be quite so accurate with mud.

(Continued on next page.)

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