

BOOKS and REVIEWS

They Came to Cordura

By Glendon Swarthout. 213 pp. New York. Random House \$3.50.

Reviewed by DON YATES

Glendon Swarthout, a professor in the basic college at Michigan State University, has seen his second novel in print. It is called "They Came to Cordura" and, broadly speaking, is an historical novel based on the attack of Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary, against the U. S. Cavalry stationed in New Mexico. Swarthout has introduced into this situation the figure of Major Thomas Thorn, 40 years old. Having been discovered hiding during the Villa raid, Thorn was relieved as executive officer and given the duty of selecting soldiers who have performed feats of bravery "be-

yond the call" and to write of special abilities proposed then for their country's highest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

FOLLOWING the last U. S. Cavalry engagement against Villa's forces, Major Thorn is further assigned the duty of escorting the five heroes nominated for the C. M. O., together with a woman accused of giving aid to the enemy across the hot, barren stretches of Chihuahua to the U. S. military post in Cordura. Their party number only seven—Thorn and his charges.

At this point the remarkable adventure begins. One by one, for a variety of reasons, the heroes start to sour on the honor Thorn is proposing for them. They try to dissuade him from submitting the citations he is writing for them along the journey, but since the major is obsessed by the importance of true courage (and by his own unaccountable lack of it), he refuses to alter his intention of proposing them all—though they no longer act like heroes—for the highest of military honors.

Through one of their group, a lieutenant, the "heroes" learn of Thorn's moment of cowardice. They turn hostile and insubordinate. The Geary woman in their midst creates troubles. They are ambushed by a party of Mexicans and lose their horses. One of their group comes down with typhoid and has to be carried on a litter. The balance of the long trip over the fantastic burning, waterless wastes has to be accomplished on foot.

SWARTHOUT'S prose is admirably suited to relation of the fast narrative. His use of detail is masterful at the outset of a novel; the first chapter is outstanding because of it, but as the action gains in momentum he ceases to cultivate the minute. His description of the cavalry engagement at Ojos Azules, which occupies the fourth chapter, is brilliantly done. Yet his handling of the dull, quiet, uneventful scenes is so striking. One observes fine control of effect in these purely descriptive lines:

"Provisional Squadron resumed the march. As the night lengthened the stars receded, so that there was little light. The cold was now absolute. Men rode stiff and swaying in the saddle, wrapped to the ears in blankets with jaws clamped against teeth chatter. Frost plumed from nostrils. There was no talk, only the click of hoofs, the squeak of leathers, the tink of bit rings, the huff of three hundred animals breathing hard."

Swarthout spends most of his periods effort in the novel gather-

Silk Hats and No Breakfast

By Honor Tracy. 207 pp. New York. Random House. \$3.50

Reviewed by TOM PHILLIPS

Honor Tracy made a five-month, 1,500 mile trip through Spain a few years ago. "Silk Hats and No Breakfast" is a witty, distillation of what she saw, heard and felt during those months.

Mrs Tracy's book is not typical of the usual travel volumes which read as if they had been slapped together overnight by travelers whose only contact with the country they write about was a fast train ride through the area.

excitingly told adventure tale. There, in one sentence, lie the chief merits of Glendon Swarthout's "They Came to Cordura."

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Woman Comments On Book Reviews

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Medical Mirror

WHAT DOCTORS SAY ABOUT: • Later-Life Problems Q. Is it normal for a person to worry about growing old? A. No. Well-adjusted people accept aging as a natural process. Your attitude toward aging can be pretty well judged by how you answer such questions as: Do you feel too old or too young? Are you too old to make changes? Is life long enough to do all the things you want to do? Do you live more in the past, present, or future? Q. Why can elderly people remember things that happened long ago but have trouble remembering recent events? A. The exact reason isn't known. As mental processes slow we seem to turn away from the present and gradually revert to the past. Q. Does hearing always fade in later life? A. Not always but most elderly people have some hearing difficulty. You may have trouble understanding speech when the speaker is more than 5 or 6 feet away. As we age the hearing apparatus becomes less sensitive to certain sounds and speech tends to become jumbled. In general this type of deaf-

ness is not helped by use of an electrical hearing aid. Q. What causes blood blisters to form on the ears and face of elderly people? A. Doctors are not sure. These "blood blisters" are actually little pools or lakes of venous blood. More men than women have these skin blemishes and it may be that long exposure to the sun, wind and cold plays a part. Q. Should older people indulge in sun-bathing? A. A little sun is all right but deep tanning may do more harm than good. The sun's rays young skin is thin and fragile and is subject to a variety of troubles including skin cancer. Baking in the sun doesn't help matters.

Material in MEDICAL MIRROR is based on various scientific publications and does not reflect the opinion of all doctors. Diagnosis and treatment of disease requires the skill and knowledge which only a physician can apply by personally attending the patient. Letters will be answered in these columns anonymously. Direct your inquiries to: J. DOWNEY RALSTON, M. D. SCIENCE EDITORS, P.O. BOX 396 Madison Square Station

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