

Familiar Scenes Color Insurance Man's Novel

George Malcolm-Smith's Puckish Humor
Flavors Tale Adapting Actual Swindle

THE TROUBLE WITH FIDELITY, by George Malcolm-Smith; Doubleday, \$2.95.

By THEODORE L. HOLDEN
Literary Editor

IT'S fun to find familiar scenes in a story you're reading, and that is one of many things Hartford readers will like about George Malcolm-Smith's new

book. He's treading on familiar ground both for himself and a large part of Metropolitan Hartford's population in centering his action in a Hartford insurance office, though you probably won't recognize the Nutmeg Indemnity Company.

"I always get Hartford, insurance and Trinity College into a story," the Travelers publicity man said over lunch at the Hotel Heublein — yes, he has Trinity and the Heublein too in this novel, his fourth.

AS IN ANY good plot there are ramifications and they spread all around the country — New York, Boston, Detroit, Buffalo, Newark, even Presque Isle, Me. In each place he uses familiar names and evokes the scene clearly with terse descriptions.

Not that he's ever been in Presque Isle, though "I think a writer should visit the places he describes," he says. But when that's impossible he digs a description out of someone who knows the place firsthand. It may take two or three hours of digging for just a few lines in the story, but that's less than the trip would take.

From the story you'd guess that every day he boards one of those bush-hopping float planes that sportsmen use so

much nowadays to reach isolated lakes in the big woods. He doesn't. He learned how by asking that, too.

* * *

THE SAME puckish humor that made "The Square Peg" such a delightful novel gives special flavor to this story of the grim pursuit of a murderer and swindler who has cost the Nutmeg Indemnity Company more than half a million dollars, unless their man Leonard Painter can catch up with him and recover.

That "unless" is "The Trouble With Fidelity." The catchy title really doesn't refer to the fugitive's relations with the stacks of beautifully stacked women who appear along his trail. It refers to the writing of fidelity bonds, a business which Mr. Painter considers "the bastard of the insurance family." The other members of the family, life, accident, fire, liability insurance—these, he says, "are all relatively clean and tidy. But fidelity is a gamble, pure and simple.

"You can't apply actuarial tables to the incidence of thievery; you just have to expect the worst and hope for the best," in Mr. Painter's words.

* * *

TO TELL MUCH of the



GEORGE MALCOLM-SMITH

story would be unfair, even though as the author says, you know who the villain is before you've gone very far. But the plot is ingenious.

And the swindler's method will work — at least it did once. It comes from the Travelers Indemnity Company's file of actual cases. It involves a lot of aliases that all match the initials on a brief case, addresses in several cities where mail stacks up with the well stacked lovelies, and a great deal of sometimes enjoyable weekend travel. Not included in the method are a couple of frozen fowl whose identities are not the only ones mixed in this story. Reading the book will straighten all that out and drive dull care away too.