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BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd.)

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who at the moment is receiving his attentions. It becomes a subject for speculation, for much literary allusion; and because the experiences occur mainly while he is travelling in Italy and Austria they supply emotional overtones to a narrative which links states of mind to changes of scene.

Mr. Gibbon is a poet; and his prose, in spite of numerous clichés, allows him to avoid some of the dangers in the method he has used. But in trying to express what he saw and felt during his three discoveries of beauty he makes the mistake of imagining that everything is relevant. Details are the elements which when brought skilfully together, create the total effect of a situation. It does not help us, however, to understand himself or the girls, if he tells us that they spent an hour or two guessing the authorship of passages in an anthology. Nor can we be deeply interested in knowing how he filled an idle hour while separated from his beloved. The constant attentions to detail means that he is building up the atmosphere of crises which never occur. He gives an impression that something really important is about to happen, and it usually turns out to be another tea party which has no interest for the reader and no consequences in the story. On page 478 the feeling remains that Mr. Gibbon has examined too closely, and too carefully, affairs of the heart which are very thin indeed compared with the love story of many a little man who lives unobtrusively in the suburbs.

—M. H. Holcroft

FORTUNE OF WAR

1939. By Kay Boyle. Faber and Faber.

THIS is an ambitious novel, skilfully contrived. But is it quite a success? One says to oneself, "Kay Boyle—ah, yes! she knows the French, of course." But does she? Compare this book with a French novel, and its occasional ungainly Gallicisms ("badly farded") look grotesque, and the passionate and ardent Corinne Audal, who has the great good fortune to be descended from both the ancient nobility of France and Napoleon's generals, becomes a creature of air, without bowels or breeding, a novelist's wraith. And her lover, Ferdi Eder, the young Austrian ski-instructor who has turned his back on his own country and a respectable career, is he a person who comes to life?

In many ways this novel has the virtues and limitations of a prolonged short story. It begins with the reveries, the looking before and after and pining for what is not, of Corinne at the moment when Ferdi has left her at the outbreak of war to join the French forces as a volunteer. This portion of the book ends with Corinne's passionate denials of what the chemist, Tarboux (an excellent character), is warning her will happen to Ferdi, that he will not go into the army, but into a concentration camp limbo with all the other equivocal foreigners who might by existing threaten the war-time security of France.

The second section parades the reveries of Ferdi, somewhat more clumsily handled, and his self-examination reveals him a hollow man, a sort of gigolo to match with his film-star

Nordic handsomeness Corinne's jealous and adulterous affection for him. His relations with his family, whom he has in effect abandoned for ever, are poisoned equally by Corinne's possessiveness and his own weakness. It does not seem altogether unjust that he is to be interned rather than allowed to fight for France.

The method of the book has too much of the flash-back, or flash-hither-and-yonder, as the thoughts of the characters turn their pallid spotlight on their peculiar miseries and ardours. The concentration on a limited theme, on a particular juncture in a relationship, is, however, an element of strength. 1939 is an interesting novel in spite of Kay Boyle's occasional tendency to over-write.

—David Hall

CHINA

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE. By L. Carrington Goodrich. Allen and Unwin.

"THE history of the Chinese people," writes Professor Goodrich in his preface, "cannot often enough be told. Old as it is, new light is being shed on it every year." This English edition of what has already become a standard short work by a China-born American scholar is doubly welcome at a time when something like a new deal seems to be preparing in China; for with no



country is it more necessary to remember the past in judging the present. And anyone who wants precedent for what is happening now north and south of the Yangtse will find it more than once in these 232 pages that record, with admirable conciseness, nearly 4,000 years of continuous history.

Most of the new light concerns the boundaries of Chinese pre-history, which are being steadily pushed back by the archaeologist and the economic historian. In an excellent series of charts, Professor Goodrich illustrates the chief findings of modern scholarship in regard to the earliest periods; and he writes illuminatingly of the long "dark age" of political disunion that followed the establishment of the first empires. The great advantage of such a work as this over, for example, the gossip but fascinating account of Mr. Tsui Chi, is its clarity: and even when the scheme of his work forces him to make generalisations, Professor Goodrich is sober, unsensational, and conservative without being stuffy. He has produced a first-rate introduction to a subject whose importance is still insufficiently appreciated in the schools and universities of this country.

—J.B.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A CANDLE FOR ST. JUDE. By Rumer Godden. Michael Joseph.

MADAME HOLBEIN, a brilliant ballerina of the past, turned an old house, outbuildings and garden into a school for the practice of the ballet. And in so doing she brought together some of the diverse types of character which the dancing stage attracts, and created a conflict of personalities and wills that almost ended in tragedy. Miss

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