

# BOOKS

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But readers of many kinds it will have, and well deserves. It might usefully be recommended to all would-be students of our new school of social welfare in the university, as a provocative and not discouraging glimpse of the fields upon which they wish to enter.

## ONE MAN'S WAR

**ARMED PILGRIMAGE**, by J. V. Davidson-Houston; Robert Hale. English price, 15/-.

THE gaudy cover of this book may suitably enclose a tale of thrilling adventure, but it bears no relation to the author's quiet, restrained manner of telling his story. From 1931-1938 Colonel Davidson-Houston lived on the uneasy fringes of war in Manchuria, Mongolia, and China proper. The outbreak of war in Europe found him in Roumania, a country whose inhabitants are much given to staring at strangers. "These people stare and stare, sometimes with their capacious mouths half open. At first I regarded this as mere rudeness, and occasionally made a face at the offender, but this merely increased his astonishment and I concluded that he simply could not help it."

Having instructed the Roumanians (possessors of oil wells) in the art of demolition, he escaped into Egypt, was Engineer-in-Chief, Middle East, and took part in the retreat from Cyrenaica. Afterwards he was in Persia at the

time of the Allied occupation. One of the few Englishmen able to speak their language, he came much in contact with the Russians, whom he evidently liked and admired, though some of their ways seemed strange. One general's female A.D.C. intrigued him. "She informed me that her husband was serving against the Germans on the Caucasian front and that she was by training a doctor; how she came to be an A.D.C. remained one of those mysteries which are also to be encountered in our own service."

Finally Colonel Davidson-Houston took part in the retreat through Burma, and afterwards in that country's reconquest as one of General Wingate's subordinates.

The author's style appears to betray the fact that he is a man with strong nerves who never loses his head in a critical situation, or his sense of proportion in recounting the frustrations, disappointments, and successes of his varied experience. Among his accomplishments is that of contriving to throw light on the characters of many people, both famous and infamous, not by laborious description but by relevant anecdote.

—R. M. Burdon

## EGOIST

**THE NARROWING LUST**, by Madeleine Masson; Allen and Unwin. English price, 12/6.

ISABELLE TAILLOIS was not at home on the Normandy farm where she was born. She had a strain of the

aristocrat in her—that strain so necessary in the make-up of any historical novel. She leaves the farm, suffers in Paris, makes a fortune in South African diamonds and real estate, builds great hopes on the development of her illegitimate daughter Sabine, so great that she gives up the man she loves for her sake, arranges a most suitable marriage for her, only to find that in Sabine the peasant strain is dominant when the girl goes off with a farm hand, shattering her mother's hopes and revealing the bankruptcy of her life. "She (Isabelle) had built up a monument of egoism," says Miss Masson in conclusion, "a tower of strength against which none had dared. She had belonged to no one, not even to herself." The construction of the book is a little slapdash, but that should not prevent those readers who enjoy historical novels from enjoying this one.

—G. leF. Y.

## ANOTHER WORLD

**HIGH VALLEY**, by Charmian Clift and George Johnston; Angus and Robertson, Sydney. 12/6.

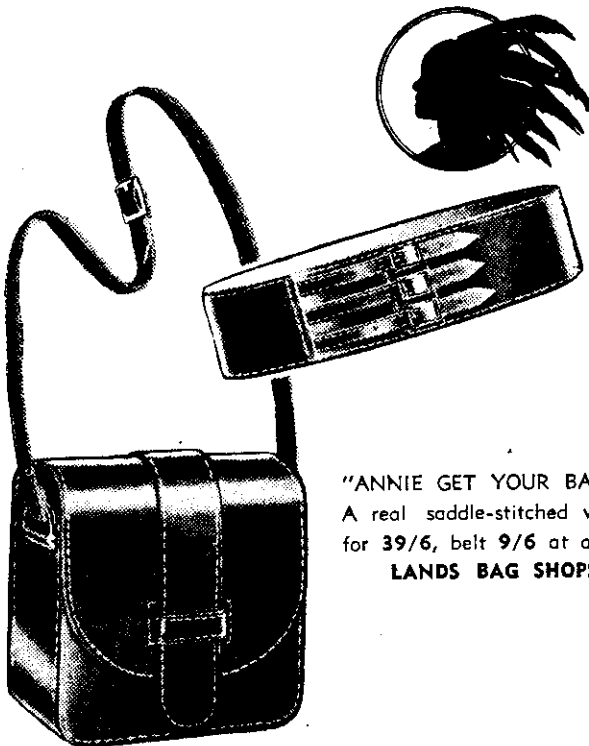
THIS novel, first prize winner in *The Sydney Morning Herald* competition of 1948, has a setting so geographically remote, a message so spiritually detached, that it achieves something of the unreality of a fairy tale. Set in an inaccessible Tibetan mountain valley, the

story tells of Salom, a Chinese boy, who journeys forth in search of happiness, finally settling with the nomadic inhabitants of the Valley of the Dreaming Phoenix. Through a combination of extraneous circumstances, however, his life there is a material failure. Also unsuccessful is his love for the headman's daughter, an emotion that flowers delicately as the tale proceeds. One shares the lovers' calm acceptance of their ordained end. Salom has learnt that for man there is neither victory nor defeat: the only immortality is life, and only by reference to the whole of this can we interpret the ripples caused by a momentary existence. The Living Buddha, too, whose religious philosophy dominates the book, has said: "The end of the story will be the best ending, the only ending for each of you."

This is a work of the imagination, naive, beautiful but not memorable. The characters are sensitively drawn, the descriptive passages warmly sensuous, though precision is sometimes a little unsatisfactorily sacrificed to effect. But there is insubstantiality everywhere. These our actors, one feels, were all spirits, and this feeling is reinforced by racial and geographical unfamiliarity. As a result, its message conveys no sense of universal significance. The prosaic reader must question the writer's

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