

Europe, with an excellent chapter by Kiss on the geographical unification of the Danube area, and a section on the particular problems of Asia.

Five-sixths of the book is concerned with the immediate problems of the present, viewed in their geographical aspects. Indeed, the editors state that "history is geography in motion," a statement with sufficient truth in it to be dangerous. The last sixth of the book, however, is concerned with problems so fundamental, and so difficult of solution, as to dwarf completely the preceding chapters, excellent though they are. These problems are the relentless rises in world population, as measured against man's food supply. Most of the evidence discussed has already appeared in periodicals concerned with geography and population, but it is excellently summed up here by Bertram of Cambridge on population trends and the world's biological resources, Thompson of Miami on population changes in Asia, Taeuber of Princeton on the population of Japan and peace, and Russell Smith of Columbia on science and population.



The picture is a grim one; every advance in human welfare, in Asia in particular, reacts at once as a drop in the immediate deathrate and a rise in population, which in the case of India is increasing at a rate of fifteen thousand souls daily. Each improvement in food supply, too, results in more swarming mouths to eat the food. If the present rise in rate of increase continues India alone will need a threefold rise in food supply in the next thirty years to maintain its present food standards, even now on the verge of starvation level. No hope can be held out for the drop in reproduction rate which has taken place in European countries; the complex changes in social patterns consequent on the adoption of European contraceptive measures could make headway only slowly in custom-bound Asian society, even under the most favourable conditions.

The authors see the pressure of population on food resources becoming more and more acute, and though they think that man will in the end adjust his reproductive rate to his food supply, they see a time of trial ahead. Such a problem is one which is the fundamental cause of much of the world's ills, and before we can hope to improve matters we must see the position clearly. This book is a help to that end.

—D. W. McK.

### BABEL SIMPLIFIED

THE WORLD'S CHIEF LANGUAGES, by Mario A. Pei, Allen & Unwin. English price, 21/-.

WAR, which disrupts most studies except severely technical ones, occasionally gives a fillip to true popular scholarship: handbooks and manuals are taken from the shelf, dusted off, and served up in new forms for general use. This American compilation (originally entitled *Languages for War and Peace*, and apparently designed for extensive service use in many war theatres) first appeared in 1946, and had reached its third edition before it found an English publisher. As it stands, it is a model of clear printing and arrangement, and is undoubtedly the handiest comprehensive elementary introduction to the practical study of spoken language in the world today.



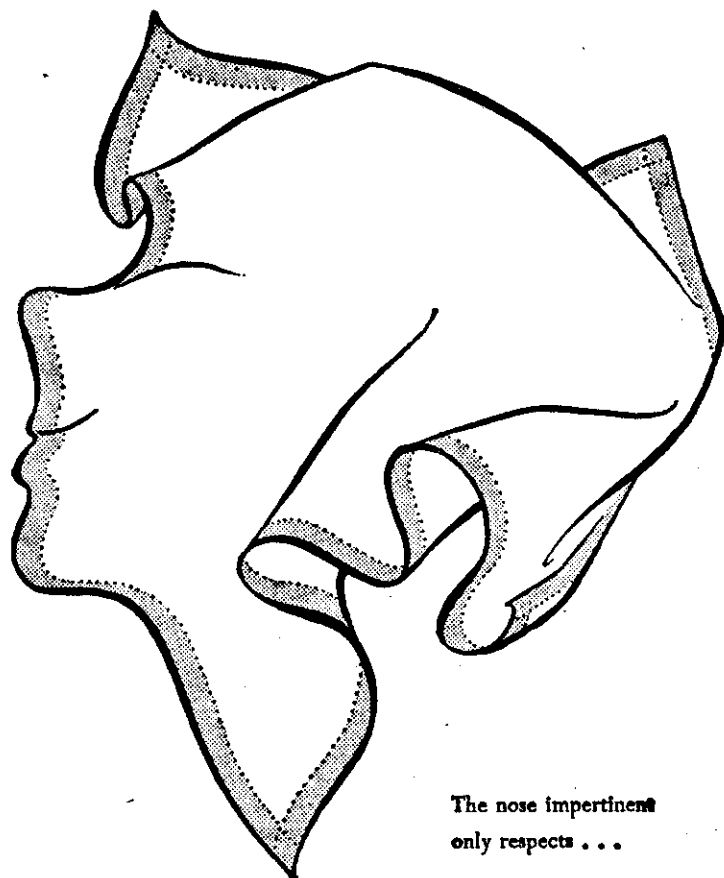
December 25 will be a New Zealand authors' night on ZB Book Review. Frank Sargeson's new novel, "I Saw in My Dream," will be reviewed by Stephen Solly (whose photograph appears above); Eric Ramsden will discuss Sir Peter Buck's "The Coming of the Maori," and John Reece Cole will review "The Huntsman in his Career," by Erik de Mauny, a former member of "The Listener" staff. The session will be chaired by Anton Vogt

Dr. Pei and his associates are fully aware of the limitations of their method, but this in turn is dictated by their main purpose, which is to "enable the individual of average linguistic ability to acquire the basic facts about the world's chief languages, where they are spoken and by whom, to identify them readily, and to handle more than just one of them in a comprehensible and acceptable fashion." The importance of this modest aim hardly needs underlining. The language specialist is well enough provided elsewhere: this is a book for the common reader and world citizen.

The key languages selected by Dr. Pei for fuller treatment are English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian and Japanese. Arabic, Chinese, Malay and Dutch are given secondary treatment; and some fifty remaining languages classified and briefly illustrated, with samples of their particular scripts. All this is a remarkable achievement in 663 pages—few reference books, for a guinea, will give as much.

Criticism, of course, is easy: the New Zealander who looks up the special characteristics of his own brand of spoken English may not feel flattered to learn that "the vocabulary often coincides with America's rather than with Britain's", and he may seriously question whether the short is universal in this country (dance perhaps, but not path?), or whether a New Zealander commonly asks for a pack rather than a packet of cigarettes, and mails his letters more often than he posts them. Yet these are trifles, after all. A more serious criticism might be levelled against the choice of

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The nose impertinent  
only respects . . .

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