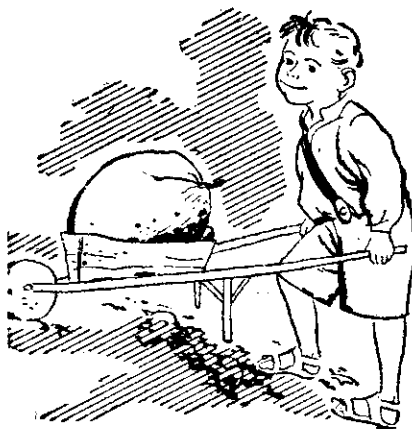


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BOOKS

A Social Investigation

THE COMMUNICATION OF IDEAS, by T. Cauter and J. S. Downham; Chatto and Windus, English price 25/-.

(Reviewed by J.D.McD.)

THE title claims too much. When one puts the book down one asks as to the purpose for which it was written. Sufficient re-readings indicate that it is a preliminary study for an investigation of advertising. In the course of the study, however, many important things emerge which dignify the investigation. While it is not strictly "a study of contemporary influences on urban life," it is yet very important—for its techniques especially. Those who have read the results of a survey of Hawera will be able to compare that with a full scale, amply reported, similar attempt. Any organisation contemplating social research based on sampling ignores it at peril. The average reader, however, is in no position to judge techniques. What then did the investigation set out to examine, and what came of it in the end?

The channels of communication examined were largely those of leisure time activity: radio, reading, hobbies, clubs, politics, religion, sports, holidays and "the pictures." Communication through work, rumour, or back fence gossip was not considered at all, in spite of the readiness with which experience vouches for such being widespread. It was found that most people spend time listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines, but the young tend to indulge more in dances and games. Clubs are obviously more important in Britain than they appear to be here, reflecting the more urban way of life; but games such as tennis and golf have a pronounced class aura in Britain. Most folk who listen to the radio use it as background while they do something else, but the only hobby to team readily with television is knitting. Football pools are the chief sporting interest, but no details are given as to winning systems.

It all looks very trite. It would be, too, but for the "Index of Communication" developed by the authors. This is a device, admittedly imperfect, to measure to what degree the person concerned is exposed to means of communication. The authors took, in each case, the number of social activities in which there was participation and then considered the frequency of these. The addition of number and frequency gives the Index. I thought that the authors

at one time toyed with the idea that frequency meant depth of interest. If they did, it was somewhat half-heartedly. A reader will notice that the Index says nothing of the effectiveness of the means of communication, nor does it indicate whether or not what was communicated was worth the effort. These are major weaknesses. Indeed, the Index could amount to a measure of busy-bodyness, if I may coin a word to add to the jargon of the book.

Nevertheless, the Index will bear development and may prove a most useful sociological device. It is a pity that it is here tied to a sterile investigation into the criteria of social class. There is a most amusing (unintentional, of course) sidelight on prestige chattels. Arrange in prestige order, car, refrigerator, washing machine, cake mixer, dormer windows! A substantial portion of the book is devoted to this form of intellectual constipation until we find, on page 271, that it doesn't matter, anyway.

The book is a record of a singularly exacting survey. The techniques are impeccable, lucidly explained and most beautifully adapted to the purposes they are to serve. Moreover, an examination of means of communication is itself a most laudable object and the lack of it has handicapped much research. I wouldn't be surprised, though, if the reader is more taken with the wealth of incidental information about Derby, where the survey was undertaken. At the end one really knows the place.

FIRE AND SUFFERING

JOAN OF ARC, by Lucien Fabre; Odhams Press, through Whitcombe and Tombs, New Zealand price 22/6.

FEW medieval personalities stand before us so vividly as Joan of Arc, and fewer still with greater poignancy. Some of those who did her to death were well meaning, but uneasy about their work, and were anxious that full records should stand as their apologia. Others were vindictive or driven by political pressures; and they, too, felt that ample documents would serve the ends of their political masters or of their personal spite. The records are therefore quite unusually detailed: and with devastating thoroughness they achieve the reverse of what their compilers intended. In particular they give us the lively picture of this astonishing personality, who cut through the sordidness of the Hundred Years War, and in defiance of all rational expectation, gave a new twist to the history of Europe.

This is the field which M. Lucien Fabre sets out to explore. He was a

soldier, engineer and administrator, who was also a notable man of letters. During the Second World War he had, as a patriotic Frenchman, tasted the bitterness of foreign occupation, and of collaboration between the Occupying Power and Frenchmen whom he despised. It was with this in mind that he wrote about that earlier period when France was torn and miserable and longing for leadership. For him the riddles of Joan's personality and influence, and the universal moral problems raised by her martyrdom, are entangled in the seamless web of French history. Here was an object of study worthy of his varied talents: and the issues raised are brilliantly set out in a brief introduction. The body of the book does not quite fulfil this high promise. The author is too enthusiastic, too laboriously detailed, and his villains are too imaginatively lurid. His valiant efforts to avoid anachronism occasionally break down. He does less than justice to Joan's contemporaries, friend and foe alike. Yet there is valid history here, and the story of a spiritual as well as a military and political struggle. It is chastening, too, to remember that a heroic French resistance movement hated the goddams of the 1420's as bitterly as the doryphores (the Occupation Troops) of the 1940's. The common heritage of Western Europe was tempered in fire and suffering.

—F. L. W. Wood

IN A DARK GONDOLA

MISSION TO VENICE, by Raymond Marshall; Robert Hale, English price 9/6. VENICE, PRESERVE ME, by John Appleby; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 9/6. ADDERS ABOUNDING, by John Lukens; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 10/6. NO THOROUGHFARE, by Denise Egerton; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 10/6. THE RETURN OF THE BLACK GANG, by Gerard Fairlie, following "Sapper"; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 10/6. THE TOFF AT THE FAIR, by John Cresssey; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 7/3.

"PAST we glide, and, past, and past!" Since I fell in love with Brownings' "In a Gondola" many years ago, I have never met a gondola in a crime story, and now before me are two thrillers jacketed with the craft. And why not? The gondola is an integral part of Venice's romance and mystery. It is silent, and if you have a scrap with someone you can toss him overboard. Don Micklem, the American millionaire-adventurer in *Mission to Venice*, keeps his own gondola and gondolier there, and they come in handy in a series of rough-houses when Don goes to solve the mystery of a British secret service agent who is supposed to have gone over to the Communists. (Of course, he hasn't.)

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 28, 1955.