

is little here explicitly of local landscape or a particular moment in history, there is yet a good deal we "might come to know New Zealand by." That should please both Mr. Curnow and Mr. Johnson; the literate public (wooded, in an immodest blurb, as a "select company of readers") may, if it is not confused by so many sailing directions, find its way through this poetic archipelago for itself.

#### A SOUTHLAND NOVEL

*STINSON'S BUSH*, by Georgina McDonald; Whitcombe and Tombs, 15/-.

A FIRST novel is a curiosity; a second novel is a test. Georgina McDonald won the historical novel competition promoted by the *Otago Daily Times* to mark the Otago centennial, with *Grand Hills for Sheep*, a story of Scottish settlers in the very early days of the province. She now presents, in *Stinson's Bush*, a story of pioneering in Southland a little later. The inspiration of the centennial and the fact that in *Grand Hills for Sheep* she confined her characters to Scots, may account for that being a better book.

The action of *Stinson's Bush* starts, not in Scotland, but in Northern Ireland, where a Protestant small farmer deserts his wife and young family. The wife, Sarah Dyer (formerly Stinson), who carries on courageously, joins her brother in New Zealand, and fits well into the life there, is the strongest character in the story. In the New Zealand scene, the Irish predominate. They mix well with the Scots, but there is a solitary Englishman who illustrates, to the point of sheer cruelty to his family, the traditional aloofness of his nation. The story tells of taming the land and of ordinary everyday happenings punctuated by crises of emotion, birth and death. Mrs. McDonald strikes me as being more at home with the Scots than with the Irish. Her Scots ring true, but her Irish are over-sentimentalised. She seems to have derived their vernacular from literary sources, whereas she absorbed Scottish speech from real life. I cannot believe that Irish children could be so rich in the idiom.

The book lacks the backbone of impressive incident or developing character. In carefully written scenes, the talk, often about domestic trivialities, flows in spate, and paradoxically, its picturesqueness helps to make it at times rather wearisome. There is too much contrivance in crises; now and then characters are jerked into action, bad and good, so that sin and repentance bear an unreal look. However, this is a detailed and sympathetic study of pioneering by immigrants who put roots into the soil and help to build a nation.

—A.M.

#### AUSTRALIA AT WAR

*AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE, 1939-1941*, by Paul Hasluck; published by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australian price 30/-.

THIS is the first volume of two dealing with social and political happenings in Australia during the 1939-45 war. It ends with the entry of Japan in 1941. Though it is an official history it was not given official scrutiny or censorship. The author, who has been journalist, university lecturer, diplomat (and now M.P. and Minister of State), was given "unrestricted access to official records from the War Cabinet papers and 'top secret' cablegrams down to the routine departmental files, and the only occasions on which he failed to obtain any paper for which he asked were those on which, owing to the extremely dis-

orderly state of departmental records, the required documents could not be found." This happened in only two departments, which had changed premises.

In thinking over whether New Zealand could produce such a frank and well-documented piece of almost contemporary history, despite the existence in New Zealand of good historians and editors, I came quickly to the conclusion that we could not. Is it that Australians are more mature, relaxed and civilised than we are?

The Australian war histories cover seven volumes for the army, two for the navy, four for the air force, four for the medical side of the war and five for the civilian side. If the others are all like this they are very good indeed. This particular volume covers defence and foreign policy in the 20 years between the wars, the state of mind and the state of preparedness of Australia at the beginning of the war, the initial lackadaisical public attitude to the war, the arguments over the Australian commitment in the Middle East and the downfall of the Menzies Government in 1941. The Cabinet minutes, the cables to London, the political manoeuvring, the sectionalism are all there. I should have preferred more analysis of the way a few able Commonwealth public servants managed to leaven the great administrative lump of war, for Australia did not have New Zealand's advantage of a unified, well-trained civil service. But maybe this aspect is covered in Professor Butlin's two volumes on the War Economy.

—W.B.S.

#### DEAD EMPIRES

*BELL FROM A DISTANT TEMPLE*, by Ronald Fraser; and *THE GOLDEN PRINCESS*, by Alexander Baron. Both published by Jonathan Cape, English price 15/-.

IT is as difficult for a novelist to make the past live, as it is for politicians to make the present liveable. He must know everything, and reject most of it. He must find patterns in incidents, and bring them out incidentally. He must be moralist, historian, artist and raconteur. He must have a long nose, even for a short profile; and he needs the infinite faith of the dead in their own resurrection. It's no wonder that historical novels so often stiffen at birth, like soulless Franksteins suffering from their author's necrophilia.

*Bell from a Distant Temple* rings sweetly over the centuries, catching the magic of ancient China in the days of Tu Fu, the poet. It is a highly stylised (continued on next page)



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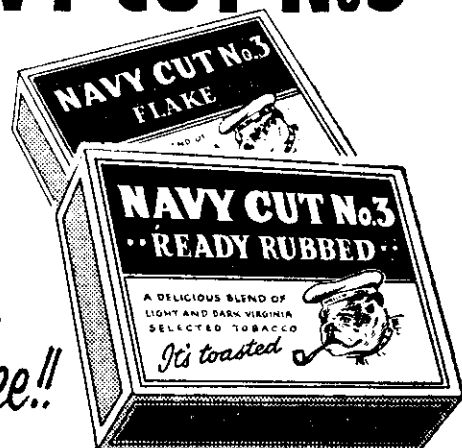


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