BOOKS

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of this very live book is in proportion to its importance.—D. W. McKenzie

SKIS IN LEBANON

DOG IN THE SNOW, by James Riddell; Michael Joseph, English price 12/6.

THE 1 Australian Corps Ski School operating in the Lebanon in the last war was perhaps the biggest organisation for ski tuition that has ever existed. With an establishment of over 100 instructors at peak, it was able to teach over 2000 pupils on ski at one time. Many New Zealand soldiers went through the school, and several were on the instruction staff—among them Mick Bowie (then Lieutenant)—the present Chief Guide at the Hermitage, Mount Cook, and Captain John Carryer, who stayed for the three years of the school's activity.

This book is in part a history of the school by its Chief Instructor, but also a record of the doings of one unpaid instructor—a large Alsatian named Rex. Once the property of a Maronite Bishop, Rex originally answered to a triple-barrelled Arabic name; but under the tuition of Major Riddell and the troops who passed through the school he soon had a working knowledge of English, especially its profane variants. In return, Rex polished up everybody's skiing, including Major Riddell's, by adding the hazard of sudden assault to all the other hazards of skiing. This nostalgic account of an uncommon wartime activity makes good reading, especially if one likes dogs, or mountains, or both. —R.A.K.

BURMA ALONE

THE UNION OF BURMA, a Study of the First Years of Independence. by Hugh Tinker; Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs. English price 42/-.

WHEN in 1949 the United States voted Burma the country of the post-war class least likely to succeed, the prediction, though born of Farther Eastern preoccupations, looked unhappily close to fulfilment. The authority of the Government ended in the outlying suburbs of Rangoon. The Communist insurrection had grown into a nation-wide civil war in which some half-dozen minority groups strove for their own ends. Social and economic disintegration appeared to be well advanced. Small wonder, perhaps, that President Truman's roving ambassador reported that Burma was "well-nigh hopeless." Uncle Sam saved his breath to cool Chiang Kai Shek's porridge, and the slow return to some semblance of civil order was accompanied by the Kuomintang invasion of 1953, and the severe economic crisis brought about by the collapse of the rice market during 1955.

Out of these disorders the Burmese have emerged with forward-looking social and economic welfare policies, a political framework of democratic socialism which compares favourably with that of many other former colonies, and a shrewd and courageous foreign policy. Hugh Tinker's excellent and detailed study, which gives the first comprehensive account of this important period in Burma's development, is thus unusually valuable. The book is scholarly as well as readable: Professor Tinker is an historian, and brings to his researches the historian's respect for sources and verification. Most of the material has not previously appeared in print, and has not been available to the public, even in Burma.

There is no attempt to gloss over the many and serious mistakes which have been made in the Union since 1948, nor is it pretended that there is not a great deal still to be accomplished before anything like stability is achieved. But the final impression given by this book is encouraging to anyone who has the interests of Burma, or post-colonial territories in general, at heart.

—William R. Roff

THE DOMINANT THEME

THE RISE OF THE NOVEL, by Ian Watt; Chatto and Windus, English price 25/-.

THE novel is without doubt the most popular reading-matter of the great majority of readers. If they were asked why they prefer the novel to other kinds of literature, most people would probably say that the novel gives them plot and suspense. Others would say the novel gives them "character." Most novel readers would agree (perhaps after some prodding) that the novel gives them a picture of life.

But how much of life? In the great majority of novels, "life" is something very restricted. It does not include work, or politics, or business—the staple of what the daily newspaper sets before us. To most novelists, "life" is a period of a few years or days or months when a man and a woman meet, court, and marry. Love is the novelist's dominant theme. There are, of course, plenty of other human motives that provide plots for literature. Hamlet is a story of revenge. He loved Ophelia — but that hardly matters. *Macbeth* is a story of ambition. He loved his wife—but that is not part of the drama. Why should drama and the epic and the long poem have such a wide range of themes and the novelist's choice be so limited?

Mr Watt, in this first-rate book, provides the answer by studying the beginnings of the novel. He sees it (in the hands of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding) as emerging at a period when for women marriage was becoming increasingly an action of free choice. The "patriarchal" family (in which she had a status quite apart from that given by her husband) was giving way to the "conjugal" family, in which her whole happiness, economic and emotional, depended on her personal choice of a mate. "Who will I marry? Will I be happy? Will I better myself?" does indeed provide the theme for Clarissa, and Elizabeth Bennett, and Jane Eyre, and Becky Sharp, and even for Molly Bloom. The novel has expanded in topic since the 18th century, but this is still its major motif.

I do not think I have met a better book on the novel. It is a classic of closely argued scholarship and illuminating criticism and can be strongly recommended both for the student and for the general reader.

—Ian A. Gordon