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## BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

joined the Special Air Service, and took part in raids behind Rommel's lines, made in co-operation with the L.R.D.G. After a short interlude in Persia, where he successfully kidnapped a Persian general friendly to the Axis, he was dropped by parachute into Yugoslavia as head of a military mission accredited to the then mysterious Tito, or whoever should be found in control of the Partisans. Excepting periodical returns to report on the situation, he remained in Yugoslavia till the German withdrawal, in intimate contact with Tito and the subordinate Partisan leaders.

Unlike Lawrence of Arabia, with whose career his own is faintly analogous, Maclean maintains the reserve of his nation and class, never allowing himself to be betrayed into introspection, or deviating from the preoccupation with reality. Yet his picture of war is slightly unreal. The horrors and atrocities he occasionally mentions stand apart as adjuncts to the scene rather than parts of the scene itself, like battle pictures hung on the walls of a vicarage drawing room. A writer cannot convey to the reader an atmosphere to which he himself is impervious. Whether this is an adequate explanation or not, one is left with a vague impression that on the whole the war was rather enjoyable, and that nobody really got hurt.

As a contribution to contemporary history the importance of this book rests largely on the light it throws on lands that lie beyond closed frontiers, or the manner in which it introduces masked personalities as creditable human beings. What goes on in Asiatic Russia, or what manner of man is Marshal Tito—the answers to questions such as these concern us more nearly than ever in a world rapidly becoming divided into two armed camps.

But apart from all attempts at critical evaluation of *Eastern Approaches* from a literary or historical standpoint, Brigadier Maclean's principal achievement

lies in having written a tale of adventure and personal experience, bearing the hall-mark of authenticity, that is every bit as thrilling as a John Buchan novel.

—R. M. Burdon

## FARM GIRL

*THE FARM ON THE HILL*, by Alison Uttley; Faber and Faber, English price, 12/6.

AS the author of 15 or so books for children—about Sam Pig, Tim Rabbit, Brock the Badger and others—Mrs. Uttley is a good deal better known than as a naturalist or at least a loving observer of country ways. But there it is, she is also the author of ten or a dozen grown-up books, packed full of memories of the life of country-folk in England backwards for the last half century or so.

The latest of these is a companion to *The Country Child*; in it the same child, Susan Garland, lives her simple but growing life. She goes to her first party, has success at school, and learns her first Latin—through the magic medium of flower names in the most magic of all flower books, John's *Flowers of the Field*, which she finds (price six shillings) in the little shop in Broomy Bale and stands quietly reading till her father comes back from the blacksmith's. "Cap-sella-bursa-pastoris is Latin for Shepherd's purse" she tells him, as she climbs into the pony cart.

It is a quiet story of quiet country life, the slow and regular daily round with the steadiness of the rise of the frothing milk in the bucket, one season's unhurried work following another without fret or stress or noisy fizzle. A book to call up pleasant memories of cream skimmed from round pan-lakes of milk, of irons rubbed on beeswax cloth on steamy ironing-day, and of spicy smells of home-cured bacon, all in the far-off, doubly pre-war days. —J.

## WRITERS TODAY

*SINCE 1939: 2*, by Robert Speaight, Henry Reed, Stephen Spender, and John Hayward; Phoenix House, English price, 12/6.

THIS book is a reprint as a bound volume of four of the British Council's series of pamphlets on the arts in Britain during and since the war. This series of brief surveys had as its object bringing the knowledge of the war-distracted up-to-date, in which it succeeded well enough. The themes of the essays in the new volume are Drama, the Novel, Poetry, and Prose Literature other than fiction, the literary history of our own time, for the approach is descriptive primarily rather than critical. The illustrations are profuse and excellent; the portrait gallery has almost the quality of a social document. The bibliographies are useful. But I am still not quite clear why work by its nature ephemeral was thought worth reproducing in a more permanent form.

—David Hall

## THE FAMILY FONG

*CHINATOWN FAMILY*, by Lin Yutang; Heinemann, English price, 9/6.

IN this book Dr. Lin turns his attention from the family in China to the family in America; always the family, the Chinese family, stable and soft as a down country hillock, everlasting as the hillock's rock foundation. Why stable? Because it is a matriarchal unit in a larger matriarchy? Perhaps. Individual women may be flighty, but Woman is an eternal colossus of relaxation, conquering by surrender, absorbing violence by quietude. In spite of the limitless possibilities of the theme, this is not Dr. Lin's best book. It is possible to detect a listlessness in the construction, as if the author were not working with the whole of his concentrated mind.



A. W. REED (above) will review "Book Selling and Publishing," by Frank Mumby, in the ZB book session on February 5. The London publisher Michael Joseph will chair the session, and other books, and reviewers, will be "The Supernatural Omnibus," edited by Montagu Summers (Norman Berrow); "Frank Harris: His Life and Adventures," by Frank Harris (John Moffett); and "The Jungle is Neutral," by F. Spencer Chapman (O. A. Gillespie).

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 3, 1950.