

BOOKS

(continued from page 13)

alted Chinese, he refers sympathetically to the devotion of an amah, or children's nurse, who was "no ordinary person; and in common with so many of her country-folk whom I have been less privileged to meet, she had a rather high sense of duty, too." One of the author's best chapters describes his meeting with a War Lord to whom he hoped to sell a few experimental tons of surface-hardening material, and who in turn was trying seriously to interest him in the purchase of eighty thousand square miles of Central China. This book is a record of customs in a land of age-old tradition and of a people whose only desire, it seemed to Mr. Farquharson, was to go their own way, undisturbed.

—E.R.B.

HEARTS AND FLOWERS

THE PRODIGAL HEART, by Susan Ertz; Hodder and Stoughton. English price, 10/6.
THE UNFAMILIAR NAME, by Stella Morton; Hodder and Stoughton. English price, 10/6.
STARS IN THE MORNING, by Vian C. Smith; Hodder and Stoughton. English price, 9/6.

THESE three novels are for readers who like their stories not too deep or serious, with the main problems at least on the way to solution at the end. In *The Prodigal Heart*, Medwin Blair, secretary to two charity workers, Mrs. Gresham and Miss Lyddon, both of whom want the greatest share of her affection and friendship, tries to hold a balance between them. The persistent Miss Lyddon is in some ways the most interesting character in the book; and the romantic situation is complex, since her nephew (a son of a brother she hates because his interference destroyed her chance of marriage) and Medwin fall in love. Medwin, herself a little too good to be true, has a family not without problems of its own. There is some hurried tidying up on the last few pages, but the author wisely leaves a question mark over the future.

The Unfamiliar Name is the story of a Christmas reunion at Mascalls, home of the Desmonds, close to the pottery that seems likely soon to pass out of the family. Some of the family are far from carefree when they arrive for the annual festivities, but as readers discover through the character of the mother, Jenny, upsets in human relations are no new thing, and sanity and time heal a good many wounds. The story is interesting and the emotions of some of the characters more earthy

than in many novels of this kind; though, as might be expected, the future of the potteries is linked with a fairly conventional love story.

Michael Cameron is getting into the top bracket in the film world when (early in *Stars in the Morning*) he inherits Rest Harrow stud farm. Will he sell, or risk his film career? Michael decides to sell, but changes his mind when a valuable mare dies one night. (This is vividly described.) Would the mare's colt be good enough to win the Derby? Of the subsidiary stories the courting of Mabel and Ernie, two of the staff, will for many readers make the most enjoyable pages of the book. The author's style can be irritating ("the silence grew a club foot, ugly and impossible"), but generally he gets briskly on with the job.

—F.A.J.

BIG BLAZE

FIRE, by George R. Stewart; Victor Gollancz. English price, 10/6.

GEORGE R. STEWART'S earlier writing has been compared with the works of Aldous Huxley, Wells and Orwell. This new novel should allow him to stand up on his own. It is beautifully written and composed of the simplest of elements. Its setting, the Ponderosa National Forest in California, is probably larger in area than all of New Zealand.

The hero of the story is fire. Few heroes have received such adequate characterisation from their authors in recent years. In some respects the book may tend to resemble the conventions of the spectacle as outlined by Hollywood. The human interest is somewhat incidental against the roaring forces of nature, but the author manages to catch up the reader and involve him in the fire with some of the best descriptive writing since Conrad, another lover of the elemental.

—Louis Johnson

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE important point to note about *Wild Life of the World* (Odhams Press, New Zealand price 13/3), is that it is not written for children. A good deal of the chapter on the sexual and social habits of apes and monkeys reads like something Dr. Kinsey might have written, and could easily be a source of embarrassment to uncles misled by the bright dust-jacket. The illustrations, over 200 of them, are in general of higher quality than the writing, which is "popular" natural history.

Sherlock Holmes Again

THE Sherlock Holmes Exhibition which was held this year as part of the Festival of Britain produced a lively correspondence in the columns of *The Times*, and letters of protest or approval were received from Dr. Watson, Mycroft Holmes, and Sherlock Holmes's landlady, Mrs. Hudson, among others. No comment came from the Great Detective himself, who was presumed to be absorbed among his beehives on the Sussex Downs, to which he had retired in 1914. Sherlock Holmes did, however, appear in Wellington last December, when he was interviewed by *The Listener* with all the respect due to such a celebrated personality. One result of this joke, which seems to have gone farther than was originally planned, ap-

pears in the letter printed below. It is the reply received by a *Listener* reader, George Fraser, of Ohura, after he had sent a copy of the interview to Joan Conan Doyle at Brampton, Huntingdon, England.

Dear Mr. Fraser,—Thank you very much for your kindness in sending me the cutting from the New Zealand paper. How extraordinary it is that some people really do think that Holmes lived. I'm not sure if *The Listener* people were taken in, but there's no doubt that a lot of people here think he was flesh and blood. I will send the cutting on to the St. Marylebone people who are organising the exhibition. I'm sure they will be interested in it. With many thanks, yours sincerely, JOAN CONAN DOYLE.



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