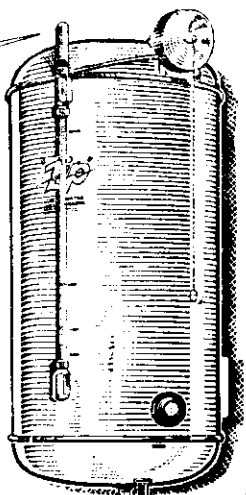


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Books

A THEORY OF VISION

THE CLAIRVOYANT THEORY OF PER-
CEPTION, by M. M. Moncrieff; Faber and
Faber. English price, 21/-.

(Reviewed by G. E. Hughes)

WHAT happens when we see an external object? The usual view is that sight is the result of light waves reflected from the object impinging on the retinae of our eyes, thus stimulating the optic nerves and finally the visual areas of the brain. But this, Captain Moncrieff contends, involves us in grave difficulties. For example, if sight is the end-product of as complicated a process as this, there seems to be no guarantee—rather an extreme unlikelihood—that what we see in any way resembles the external object; again, how can we explain the fact that we see things as "out there" and not as somewhere inside our heads? Moreover, there is an increasing body of evidence for what is usually called *clairvoyance*, i.e., visual awareness of objects which doesn't seem to be obtained by means of the sense-organs at all, and it seems impossible to fit this into the conventional picture.

Captain Moncrieff proposes to solve these and other difficulties by a new theory of vision which regards clairvoyance not as a rare freak but as the basic constituent even in ordinary vision. What the theory in outline amounts to is this: we have the ability to be aware of things directly, just as they are. This ability does not necessarily depend on our visual organs; we occasionally exercise it independently of them, and perhaps some of the lower animals do so on a large scale; but obviously it would be highly inconvenient if we were continually aware of everything, and so in the course of evolution we have developed organs (eyes, optic nerves, etc.) of such a nature that in ordinary experience our power of seeing things directly comes into play only when these organs are stimulated. It would thus be truer to say that the function of our visual organs is to restrict our vision to what we can conveniently deal with, rather than actually to produce sight.

This is not an altogether original suggestion, but it is, I think, the first time it has been worked out with anything like the thoroughness and elaboration which Captain Moncrieff displays. It would be too much to say that I have been altogether convinced by his arguments, or that I find everything in the book as clear as I would like it to be; but I cannot help being impressed by the detailed and painstaking way in which he sets out to show the compatibility of his theory with the experimental evidence about vision, and by the advantages he claims for his theory over its rivals. Not the least of these advantages is that it enables us to hold that the qualities we see when we look at things really do belong

to them—even the notorious colour-qualities, which most theories regard as subjective; and this, to say the least, is highly flattering to common sense.

(Captain M. M. Moncrieff has lived in New Zealand for 30 years. His book has attracted much notice from philosophers in England and in the United States.—Ed.)

SPILT MILK

PEKING DIARY, by Derk Bodde; Jonathan Cape. English price, 16/-.

THESE impressions of Peking in 1948 and 1949, before, during and after its seizure by the Communists, are a sober and honest record of things seen by a Chinese-speaking American professor who has long known China. Derk Bodde commends the order and incorruptibility of the new China; he acknowledges its mistakes, particularly the ineptitude of its propaganda. At the same time he criticises his own country for its blind support of the impossible Kuomin-

tang regime: "The United States, by its concrete policy in China, has done as much as anyone else to discredit, in the eyes of thinking Chinese, those abstract democratic principles which it would most like to see function there." Since this book was written the Korean war has made any sort of rapprochement between the democracies and the new China infinitely more difficult, and we can scarcely make the same answer today to the inevitable question, "What can we save from this wreck?" A backward country trying to better itself by imposing socialism on a disintegrating society notoriously lacking in social consciousness is one thing; a nation abandoning internal reconstruction for war is another.

—David Hall

NEIGHBOURS' HISTORY

UP THE COUNTRY, by Brent of Bin Bin; Angus and Robertson. Australian price, 14/6.

SINGING CORAL, by Sverre Holmsen, translated from the Swedish by Joan Bultman, decorations by Douglas Woodhall; James Barrie. English price, 12/6.

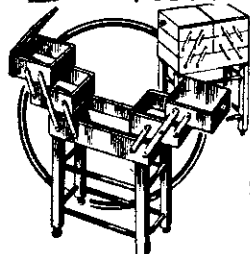
IN the interval between its first publication in 1931 and the date of the present reprint, *Up the Country* has been described more than once as an Australian classic. The first 10 or 15 pages of the book do not bear this out. Characters pile up like sheep in a pen before dipping and the sentences are overloaded and amateurish. Then quite suddenly such faults cease to matter to the reader, perhaps cease to exist. The garrulous story has the casual authenticity of district gossip; there is melodrama and sentimentality, there are detours and asides—not the truth possibly, but a lively version of it. *Up the Country* is what was claimed for it on the dust-jacket, an Australian classic.

From Australia to the islands. *Singing Coral* is a novel about early Polynesian voyages in the Pacific, complete with a glossary of 12 pages and a list of characters, 36 in all. The author

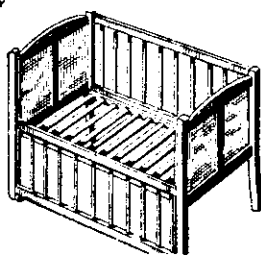
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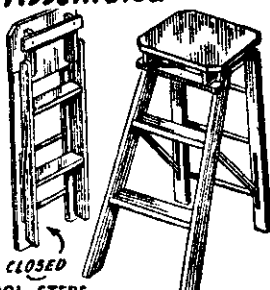


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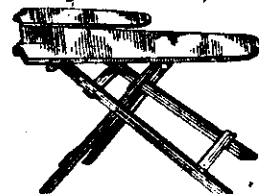
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