

Between The Pages

With Osric

What a pleasure it is to use a decent library, well housed and well stocked! The reflection is prompted by grim memories of what passes for a library in some towns.

I am thinking of a brick and concrete tomb in a southern borough to which the years had brought age without dignity, and moss without charm.

Stains in strange shapes marred the walls and the dampness fed crumbling crops of mildew. The shelves, the issue-desk, the elderly stove were all trapped in high wire cages, the purpose of which no one knew.

There was ample space, for the books huddled in an alcove where shelves climbed into the dimness beyond one's reach, leaving a large expanse of grubby, resonant boards.

How clean, cheerful, light and airy is our own library by comparison.

The Waipukurau Borough Council is to be congratulated on this splendid amenity.

Reviews

● REPORT FROM A CHINESE VILLAGE, by Jan Myrdal:

This is a phenomenon—a book about China which has something really new to say!

The Swedish anthropologist who wrote it spent some time at Liu Ling, a village occupying a valley cut in the deep wind—deposited silt of North China.

Through an interpreter he interviewed every adult in the village, and here transcribes what they told him. His own peasant background seems to have given him the knack of gaining the confidence of these quiet, shrewd farmers.

The result is most convincing. After the screeds of propaganda and counter-propaganda, after the piles of superficial travellers' tales, we have something which rings true.

These people, despite a life of toil and upheaval, sound much like ourselves. They are neither fanatics nor saints, but men on the land forcing it to render them a living.

While they use modern techniques where they can (they are preparing to buy a tractor), yet continuity with the past in work and customs is equally apparent.

There are some most attractive characters: Mau Ke-Yeh, the cave-builder, who explains how to dig yourself a house; the Old Secretary, father of the village, for whom the author conceived a warm respect and friendship.

Do not be put off by the massive bulk of this important book. Read the introduction and then choose at

random which chapters to read.

The book is profusely illustrated with photographs and with the unusual and effective line drawings made by Myrdal's wife.

YEAR BOOK WITH A DIFFERENCE

New Zealanders have been recently—and probably correctly—reproached for becoming obsessed with our Asian neighbours down the street while neglecting our neighbours next door—the Pacific Islanders.

Their population problems are no less urgent than those of Thailand; and our experience of a Polynesian-European society should qualify us to make a useful contribution to their welfare.

A reference book of peculiar charm discovered on the library shelves is the **PACIFIC ISLANDS YEAR BOOK**, by R. W. Robson (pub. 1959). A section of advertisements gave me real pleasure.

Their subjects included: Antimalaria tablets; "South Pacific" beer (a Port Moresby brew); gold bricks; "Hytest" canoe adzes; cocoa bean driers; the Wau Hotel, Wau, (Tel: Wau 25); and petrol-driven irons.

The articles, which cover all the major and most of the minor islands are packed with information, both useful and useless about Tetiaroa, off Tahiti, where royal brides were sent for fattening . . . and about Clipperton, a French phosphate island where, in 1917, an immense negro light-housekeeper murdered the other men and enslaved the women until one of them killed him, in turn with an axe . . . about Robinson Crusoe's island, where the principal industry for the 450 colonists is catching lobsters.

It beats the New Zealand Year Book hollow!

An Odd Fact

I suppose that the schools are somehow to blame but it is an odd fact that the most powerful, readable and interesting novels are stigmatised as "classics" and, therefore, fit only to be bought in limp, royal-blue bindings to give to children.

The consequence is that being neglected by the child, they remain unread and become part of the interior decoration.

"I've got nothing to read" we moan. We ignore that gold-lettered group containing the wit of Jane Austen, the terror of Emily Brontë, and the robust world of Dickens.