

## Mysterious, Exotic, and Remote

*The sloe-eyed world of Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific provides the set for "Paradise in Trust," by Robert Trumbull (Sloane. 222 pp. \$3.50), "The Little World of Laos," by Oden Meeker (Scribners. 256 pp. \$4.50), "The Sawbwa and His Secretary: My Burmese Reminiscences," by C. Y. Lee (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 245 pp. \$3.75), and "Flowering Lotus: A View of Java," by Harold Forster (Longmans, Green. 281 pp. \$5.75). Jeanne S. Mintz, who appraises their value, is a specialist on Southeast Asian affairs and currently program director of the Asia Society.*

By JEANNE S. MINTZ

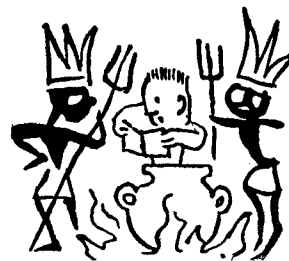
**D**ESPITE the increased number of American tourists in Asia and the tens of thousands of American officials—quiet, noisy, ugly, and beautiful—who have served there over the past decade, the countries and peoples of that part of the world still remain for most Americans mysterious, exotic, and remote. Now we have four new books, three on Southeast Asia, one on the Southwest Pacific, which help to make these fascinating parts of the East a little less inscrutable.

"Paradise in Trust: A Report on Americans in Micronesia, 1946-1958," by Robert Trumbull, deals with the area which is probably least familiar to the average American today. As its subtitle indicates, the book is an account of the impact of American policy on the lives of the peoples of the Marshalls, the Marianas, and the Carolines, those palm-lined atolls which once claimed a major share of our headlines and since V-J Day have been largely ignored by all except those who bear immediate responsibility for their administration. Trumbull, a veteran reporter for *The New York Times*, is an experienced and competent journalist and his highly readable book is packed with essential information on the political, social, and economic development of the island peoples. Along with his sketches of the islanders themselves, Trumbull presents pictures of some extremely attractive Americans hard at work helping the peoples of the trust territories adjust to the awesome transitions thrust upon them. This is a thoughtful account of what under our tutelage is happening to the thousands of Pacific islanders for whom we have assumed temporary responsibility.

A few weeks ago when the Laotian

Government's decision to renounce the Geneva agreements of 1954 hit the front pages, most readers had to consult their atlases to find out that Laos is one of the states carved out of what was once Indo-China. Having done so, they are at least aware of the vital strategic position conferred upon Laos by sheer geography: backed up against the southern tip of China and flanked on the east by Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnam, Laos is just one more example of the current phenomenon of international crises erupting in lands which few Americans know exist. Oden Meeker's "The Little World of Laos" should help to introduce that beleaguered kingdom to a wide audience. Meeker, who spent a year in Laos as director of the CARE mission, has written a lively story of his experiences there and in the neighboring countries of Thailand and Cambodia. His chapters on Laotian history and culture are of special interest because the ground he covers is so little known outside the circles of experts. It is disappointing, however, that Meeker is so preoccupied with the hardships of his own daily existence that one wonders if he will ever get past his complaints about the inadequate accommodations at the hotel in Vientiane and elsewhere to tell us something about the Laotians and how they live. Indeed, the Laotians one finally does meet in his pages fail to come alive as individuals but remain almost caricatures, albeit charming ones, of the mysterious Oriental. Nevertheless, the book has much to recommend it.

C. Y. Lee's stories of his life in one of the Shan states on the China-Burma border in the early 1940s, "The Sawbwa and His Secretary," depict a way of life equally as alien to most Americans as that of Laos, but Lee's characters are human beings, alive and real whatever their personal or



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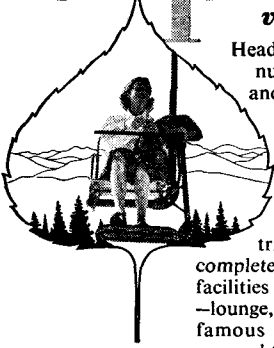
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cultural eccentricities. These tales, several of which have appeared in *The New Yorker*, are vastly entertaining sketches of the life that flourished in the tribal enclaves of the Shan tribes, shaken but not fundamentally altered as yet by the incursion of the Burma Road. Lee, author of the "Flower Drum Song," presents his sometimes startling Shan neighbors in a pleasantly low-keyed fashion, from the Sawbwa, with his determined if rather unusual efforts to modernize his state, to the local girls, who have an opportunity to pick their husbands through a highly ritualized kind of pillow-fight.

"The Flowering Lotus: A View of Java," by Harold Forster, offers a good survey of Javanese culture, written with considerable warmth and insight. Forster is an Englishman who recently spent four years in Jogjakarta teaching English at the local university and soaking up as much as he could of Javanese music, theatre, dance, and history. He has woven what he learned into an interesting and informative book, touching on many of the religious beliefs and customs of the Javanese people, as well as the arts of modern Java. Forster makes no pretense of writing a basic guide to present-day Indonesia but he does provide the Western reader with a valuable introduction to the people of this most populous island of the largest country in Southeast Asia. He touches only glancingly on politics, which is fortunate, since his few excursions into this area, where he admits his ignorance, are riddled with inaccuracies.

**FRASER YOUNG'S**  
**LITERARY CRYPT NO. 827**

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 827 will be found in the next issue.*

N ABC'D DEFCGHFDI

JK BLC MBCOICNICMI

NCDB BDPIE QIBQHI'G

ARDNIG.

—IHNBD.

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 826*

The highest price we can pay for anything, is to ask it.

—W. S. LANDOR.

and water into gleaming and wondrous towers. Not enough to convert fluids into fabrics. Not enough to convert the invisible atom into an infinity of power. Not enough to convert the rush of water into the whirling fantasy of the dynamo and thence into the magic impulses that banish darkness or turn wheels or carry images and voices over empty space.

What is most needed now is to apply the human conversion skills to those things that are now most essential for his survival. Man has to convert facts into logic, free will into purpose, conscience into decision. He has to convert historical experience into a design for a sane world. He has to convert the vast processes of education into those ideas that can make this globe safe for the human diversity. And he will have to learn how to convert the individual morality into a group ethic.

Our lack of conversion skills in these respects has converted us into paupers. The plenty produced by our scientific and physical skills has not relieved the poverty of our purposes. The only thing greater than our power is our insecurity. All our resources and all our wealth are not enough to protect us against the effects of irrational ideas and acts on the world stage. It makes little difference how magnificent are our new buildings or how impressive are our private kingdoms. If no answer is found to war, all men will die poor.

The library—and the term is used here as symbolic of the universe of knowledge, systematic and unsystematic both—the library can be a strong part of the new conversion process. It can furnish the basic materials that must go into the making of the new purposes and designs.

Some people may take the fatalistic view and say it is too late. They may say that man cannot possibly develop the comprehension necessary to deal with change in the modern world, that he will require many centuries before his conversion skills can be developed as they now need to be developed in the cause of human survival.

But there is a larger view of man, one that history is prepared to endorse. This view holds that the great responses already exist inside man and that they need only to be invoked to become manifest. For man is infinitely malleable, infinitely perfectible, infinitely capacious. It is the privilege of anyone in a position of leadership to appeal to these towering possibilities.

—N. C.