SUBTLE FLAME, by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Australasian Book Society, 300 pp, $3.95.

A NEW novel from Katharine Susannah Prichard is always an event in the literary world. Few writers have so consistently influenced writing in this country; few have ventured into so much virgin territory or covered such a wide range of subject matter. It is fifty-two years since her first novel *The Pioneers* won an Empire-wide competition. But it was not until 1926, with her book *Working Bullocks*, that notice was served, in no uncertain manner, that a new writer of unusual strength and insight had appeared on the Australian literary scene.

If there is a connecting link, a thread running through Katharine Prichard's work, it is surely her humanity, compassion and reverence for life. This is the dominating theme that illuminates her latest novel, *Subtle Flame*.

The story is set against a background of almost contemporary Melbourne life. This is the Melbourne towards the closing stages of the Korean War and the period immediately preceding the Peace Conference of 1959. It is a Melbourne vibrant with life and color. On the one hand, gusty, gay, provocative; on the other, conservative, corrupt, backward, decaying. It is the city of the great monopolies, the prostitution of the press, the drug rackets. Under the developing threat of nuclear terror the author sets her characters to work.

To some extent the city itself has taken on a living personality, and Katharine Prichard, with skill and precision, reveals facet after facet. This is the familiar, the loved city of the south, but with a difference. We are seeing it through fresh eyes, with someone who is as much at home in the office of a newspaper magnate as in the room of the humblest pensioner.

Much of Katharine Prichard's work is concerned with revealing the inner meaning of life; the struggle between man and himself, and man and his society. Thus, in this story, David Evans, the successful journalist, editor-manager of an important Melbourne newspaper group, sets out on his wandering in search of a new identity. This is the story of a man with a burdened conscience who leaves wife, family, comfortable middle-class home, secure position; a man who can no longer live with himself.

The death of his son Robert in the Korean War is the personal tragedy that influences his decision. He is guiltily aware of his failure to present the true facts of the Korean conflict in the newspapers under his control. His agony of spirit is revealed early in the book in the age old cry, "My son. My son. Would that I had died for thee."

In his flight David determines to embark on a program of free-lance writing, a program designed to bring the truth, at least, to the public. But as others have found before him, a journey of self-discovery can be an agonising journey. Not only because of the psychological overtones, but because the journey will point up sharp material differences, as well. Changing mental attitudes will throw up conflicts where none might have been expected. These will, to some extent, influence the behavior of even old and trusted friends. What newspaper editor, for instance, will welcome articles smacking of pleas for peace and understanding, or radical, left-wing thinking? Despite David's great skill as a journalist, his articles are rejected.
He drifts and becomes something of a derelict. During this period he becomes familiar with the lives of boxers, waterside workers, migrants, prostitutes, housewives and others. He learns how it feels to be poor, hungry, cold; to be badly dressed and repudiated. The death of his wife Clare is another bewildering loss at this stage of his life. His positive gain is the friendship of a young girl, Sharn Leigh, a peace worker. They join forces and Sharn introduces him to others. This situation corresponds with the end of part one of the novel. It seems to me that the author is warning of the futility of the "lone wolf" approach, of the need to join forces, and the necessity of unity if we are to survive.

In part two there is a shift of accent. This could well be titled "The story of David's temptation, backsliding and redemption." A voyage of discovery is not always plain sailing. Too often the voyager will hesitate, draw back, fearing the challenge of the unknown. Part two finds David, ill with fever, wandering in the rain outside his old newspaper office. A young woman Jan, who was a junior when David was in charge of the papers, recognises him and takes him to her flat. She is now occupying an important position in the newspaper world. David is made a virtual prisoner, though Jan nurses him back to health and he undertakes certain journalistic tasks for her. They form a not very satisfying sexual relationship. For the time David drifts with the tide. But family problems intrude and David frees himself from Jan's influence. He meets Sharn again and returns to his room in the poorer part of the city, determined to continue his search for truth, and help in the struggle for peace.

He had previously befriended a young boy, Tony, who was involved with an unsavory crowd at a restaurant. The importance of this episode does not become clear until part three.

Work for the peace conference is now well in hand. Part three is dominated by preparations for the conference, David's association with the boy Tony, and his growing love for Sharn. David is arrested on a trumped up charge and serves a time in prison. He is discharged and his friends who have always believed in him welcome him back. He has become more and more part of the working class movement. His marriage to Sharn is not unexpected.

This is a penetrating novel and a deep analysis of life in a big city. The background material alone, the movement for peace, the pen pictures of world-famous people, the understanding of life in different social strata, the uneasy world situation, mark it as a work high above the average.

Though Katharine Prichard is uncompromising in portraying her vision of life as she sees it, her characters are always real, always living, always credible. It is not exposing truths about a society that produces bad literature, but rather the failure of the writer to present her material with true understanding and artistry. Katharine was one of our first writers to absorb this and it has been a feature of her work ever since. This understanding has shaped her novels and short stories, so that we read not only stories, creations, but part of our history, too.

David Evans' journey is a journey that many have already taken. It is a journey that will face many in the future. The situations might not be quite the same situations, the people not quite the same people, but the track will be recognisable.

In her eighty-fourth year Katharine Prichard has again demonstrated her belief in people. She has produced not only a significant novel, but a passionate plea for world peace, and an important social document.

MENA CALTHORPE.

"IF YOU PRICK us do we not bleed? if you tickle us do we not laugh? if you poison us do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not seek revenge?"

The Merchant of Venice.

This is a selection of prose and poetry drawn from all the countries of Africa. For the most part, they are written in English, although some are translated from the French and Portuguese. There are so many native languages in Africa, that it is uneconomic for books to be printed in them, so the African writer uses the language of the race that conquered them in which to develop his literature.

The language may not be indigenous African; but the works contained in this collection most certainly are. Yet they underline the fact that there is no typical African, no ideal of a noble savage breaking his bonds. These works are of ordinary men and women, experiencing commonplace emotions. The setting and culture may be different from ours, but these stories and poems invite us in to join the experiences of the African.

Many people may be surprised to find that Africans have feelings, or write love poems. As yet they do not turn out stereotyped situations beloved of our women’s papers, which pass for love stories. But who can doubt the feelings of Mbella Sonne Dipoko, from the Cameroun, who writes:

"Let us go and learn by the candle of fire-flies
The difficult lesson on radio signalling
Which others older than us have felt
On the blackboard of the long night,
So that tomorrow when we are apart
We may transmit on the frequency of love
Those intimate messages we can never post."

Some of the writings lean heavily on native mythology, such as Bendek’s Gift, by Sarif Easmon (Sierra Leone). He tells how the tribe sentences to death a warrior who fled from battle when he was wounded. Another tale, Wages of the Good, by Birago Diop (Senegal), has the character of an Aesop’s Fable.

While we are still looking at the stories that rely on folklore, Grace Ogot (Kenya), has written the tale of a cannibal, Tekyo, and how his family dealt with the crime. To our Western minds, cannibalism is a matter for horror; so it is revealing to see with what sympathy the subject is treated, as well as with a matter-of-fact attitude.

At least two of the stories are particularly interesting as they deal with attitudes to white men. Camara Laye (Guinea), writes of a slightly simple man called Clarence, who is sold by cunning coloreds to a chief to service his wives, as he is growing too old. This is a good-humored satire on the white/black attitude. Far more bitter and ironic is Lewis Nkosi (South Africa), in his story of The Prisoner, which involves a change in role between the white man, George, who was originally Mulele’s warder, and Mulele, who ended up as George’s warder when George broke the apartheid laws, and took a colored woman for his mistress.

Every author has a different tale to tell, and a different situation to unfold. One tells of the chaos in a village when their hereditary leader
turns Christian and wants to become a priest. He refuses to take up his hereditary position, as it means marrying a number of wives.

Also, from Cameroun, comes the excerpt from *The Old Negro and the Medal*, which describes how the hero, Meka, is forced to stand within a whitewashed circle for hours, awaiting to be awarded a medal for his services to the white regime; and how the experience caused him to be disillusioned with the white supremacy myth.

I could go on describing these stories and poems for ever, as each is worthy of mention, and it is hard to select and discard. The whole collection serves to give the intelligent reader a map of themes and styles of African writing in metropolitan languages. They add a further dimension to the literature of the world, by being peculiarly African experiences superimposed on world concerns.

Hazel Jones.


Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is a splendid book, a work of burning honesty and compelling analytical power. It is a book in which, as Jean-Paul Sartre says in the preface, "the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through Fanon's voice."

The nobility of its vision is perhaps best summed up in this paragraph from the conclusion: "It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling of his unity. And in the framework of the collectivity there were the differentiations, the stratification and the blood-thirsty tensions fed by classes; and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, there were racial hatreds, slavery, exploitation and, above all, the bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen hundred millions of men."

It is about these "fifteen hundred millions of men" the "wretched of the earth", the peoples of the colonies and other lands who have been or are dominated by the European, that Fanon writes.

Fanon, a Martinique-born psychiatrist who practised in Algeria and took part in the liberation struggle there, is essentially concerned with the process of the emergence and upbuilding of the national consciousness of colonial and former colonial peoples.

In the course of his examination of this process, he has produced what amounts to a full-scale account of the psychology of the colonial condition, as it affects both rulers and ruled.

Only in Ho Chi Minh's *French Colonialism on Trial*, written in the 1920's, has this reviewer come across anything like the appallingly concrete evocation of colonial life that is offered by the case histories presented in Fanon's chapter, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders".

But it is more than evocation and description. Fanon, who died in 1961, before Algeria achieved freedom, was also a revolutionary activist and thinker. He is concerned in this work (especially in the chapters on "Spon-
танея" and on "National Consciousness") to establish political models for the life of the newly free countries.

His observations on the means by which the way to socialism can be found in the conditions of the third world are no doubt today serving as a guide to a whole generation of participants in the struggle for genuine liberation from colonialism.

His treatment on the question of revolutionary violence—for the colonised man, a "way of re-creating himself"—is as majestic a piece of writing as is likely to be found anywhere in contemporary political literature.

Although Fanon pays scant attention to the socialist countries as such, he is keenly aware of the importance of their existence in the international arena to the forward political movement of the Third World.

He is also firmly wedded to socialism as the wave of the future for the countries of the Third World. Fanon writes: "Capitalist exploitation and cartels and monopolies are the enemies of under-developed countries. On the other hand, the choice of a socialist regime, a regime which is completely orientated towards the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions will allow us to go forward more quickly and more harmoniously, and thus make impossible that caricature of society where all economic and political power is held in the hands of a few who regard the nation as a whole with scorn and contempt."

Fanon’s book is justly described by its publishers as "a classic of anti-colonialism".

Ronald Segal’s The Race War, on the other hand, is a brilliant, and, it seems to me, often irresponsible, piece of political journalism.

Segal’s central thesis, advanced with an encyclopedic command of historical fact, is that world history is tending towards a universal clash between the poor, colored peoples of the world on the one hand and the rich, white peoples on the other.

He writes: "The two colors or races are physically clashing in a dozen parts of the world already, whether through riots in the slums of American cities or the engagement of guns in South Vietnam and Angola. It is the contention of this book that the occasions for clash must multiply, and the war grow ever more intense, unless the circumstances which provoke the antagonisms of race are themselves removed."

He adds: "I do not attempt to deny that whites may, for greed or fear or a difference of belief, fight each other, as they have done so often before; I am well aware that non-whites, similarly excited, have recently been fighting with each other, from the Himalayas to the Sudan. But it is my belief that the whites and the non-whites are, for the most powerful of reasons, each drawing closer together, and that the struggle between them is the major preoccupation of mankind."


Taking one feature of the vast complexity of world political phenomena, however valid in itself, and elevating it into a virtual absolute, might well make for interesting reading. And Segal’s book is nothing if not readable. Whether this practice makes for good politics, however, is another matter.

So dogged is he in pursuit of his
central argument that Segal passes virtually unnoticed such a central socio-political contradiction as that between socialism and imperialism. This lack contributes to the visionary, apocalyptic character of the work, however persuasively the case is argued in many places.

The author is so anxious to thrust the Soviet Union into his "White World of London and Moscow" that he does real violence to the actual Soviet record by the prominence he gives to the incidents reported some years ago (and unrepeated) of alleged racial discrimination against African students at Soviet universities.

In the international field, too, he is forced by his hypothesis of future Chinese leadership of the entire "world of color" to heavily overplay the suggestion that the Soviet Union is mistrusted by the colored peoples because the Russians are white.

Rich Japan also presents Segal with some difficulty. But this is overcome by claiming that Japan, though colored, is regarded as a mere "satrap" of the "white" world.

Confronting Mr. Segal's thesis with two real, current, international crises, one is inclined to the view that the mechanisms of world conflict are in fact far more complex and varied than the concepts of The Race War allow for.

Where, for example, are the clear lines of color dividing the two sides involved in the Vietnam war, in which the Soviet Union is the main supplier of the embattled Vietnamese, who face, among other invaders of "color", some 50,000 troops from South Korea?

And where are these same color lines as far as the contending forces in the Middle East crisis are concerned?

Mr. Segal's book, it seems to me, is a classic illustration of the proposition that a truth, when carried beyond the point of its application, ends up as an error.

All this is not to deny the value of the book as a compendium of racist crimes and as a searchlight on the pre-colonial history of many countries. The section on pre-colonial Africa is particularly good.

Mr. Segal, a South African now working in London as editor of Penguin Books' African Library, has to some extent at least cast the whole world in the mould of his native land's present apartheid system.

But, it seems, the world does not fit altogether easily into this mould.

Malcolm Salmon


PRINTERS AND POLITICS is only the second full history of an Australian trade union to be published in the last fifty years. Unionists and everyone connected with the labor movement should reflect on the backwardness which this shows. The truth is that despite pride in the strength of the Australian trade unions we lack much of the basic knowledge to explain their past, understand their present or guide their future.

Hence Dr. Hagan's book is a particularly valuable study and one with its special interest, because at the heart of printing has been a unique craft of men whose indispensable skills made them an aristocracy of labor and at the same time educated, articulate working class intellectuals. Despite the title it is much more about printers than politics. It is a many-sided...
history of their unions in a diverse industry which was both traditional and changing. The questions they faced are the same as those which confront unions today: only the circumstances have changed.

We follow the unions in prosperity and depression, strength and weakness, confidence and despair. They epitomise the ideas and forces which have moulded Australia. We see clearly the heritage which the Australian working class brought from Europe, the early struggles against the masters' law and convict labor. We feel the heady excitement of the gold rushes, then watch the determined building of solid unions that would last in the years of prosperity to 1890. Already the question of "whether to limit themselves to preserving the privileges of their craft, or to take on the less skilled" had arisen. Experience showed there was no choice—the protection of craft privileges required the organisation of the unskilled.

The printers' unions survived unemployment and strike defeats in the depression of the 1890s. Out of that travail came the Labor Party and compulsory arbitration. In the slow revival to the First World War the unions gained new experience in strikes and arbitration courts, Commonwealth and State awards, in dealings with Labor and non-labor governments, in industrial and political action. They were torn by the conscription struggles and strikes of the First World War, touched by the I.W.W. militancy. They suffered again in the depression of the 1930s, lifted their eyes to perceive the threat of fascism and war, took part in the national effort of the Second World War and the post-war struggles for the forty hour week and a better life. They reflected the attitudes of the Cold War period and in 1966, spurred by technological changes, combined in the Printing and Kindred Industries Union to provide a significant example of the current amalgamation trend.

So the printers illustrate a great deal of Australia's past. It is one of the merits of Dr. Hagan's book that he gives a clear picture of the periods in Australian history, their economic, political and social characteristics, and of the position of the printers in each of them.

Because this is a pioneering work the author has to do everything himself. He has to explain the technological changes which constantly affected the printers—the illustrations of this are excellent. He has to discover the structure and economics of the industry at each stage, and to write a commemorative volume which celebrates the jubilee of a federal union. The unions must be traced in each Colony or State, when they were often quite separate. Only the author's smooth style and skill in compression enables him to encompass all this.

It is a careful, objective and scholarly book which is still close to an academic thesis in its exactness of detail and its caution in judgement, although it is told with quiet humor and unfailing humanity. Often the reader would like to see some themes carried further as the large questions which arise for the trade unions and the labor movement are presented. Dr. Hagan does not hide his commitment to his printers and labor but he is writing history from which each reader must draw his own conclusions. He neither romanticises the workers nor vilifies the employers but seeks to understand and explain their actions and the objective circumstances which governed them.

A book like this is a major job which will take at least three years' full-time work by a professional historian or a trade union official. There is no way of doing it quickly or easily, yet we wander in the dark without such studies. Very little labor history
has been written in Australia compared to, say, Britain, and much of that has been strictly political. Undoubtedly this reflects the gap between the labor movement and intellectuals in this country, which can only be overcome by co-operation on both sides.

The Printing Industry Employees' Union, as it then was, is to be congratulated on making its records available and sponsoring the research. It was fortunate to find in Dr. Hagan an author who combines the skills of an historian with experience in the labor movement. Its history is celebrated in a volume of lasting value which makes a wider contribution. We need more trade union histories of this quality.

E. C. Fry.


MOST PEOPLE can recall that in the recent past the two largest ideological structures of the world, Catholicism and Communism, were monolithic, rigidly ruled systems. Criticism from within was only tolerated within narrow confines, if at all. The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Vatican 11 Council were focal points in a process of change. Whatever these two historically important meetings achieved, or failed in, they gave the impetus that has lifted criticism and proposals for renewal into the open. Progress is both necessary and painfully demanding. C. G. Jung expressed himself as follows: "Jesus is the perfect example of a man who preached something different from the religion of his forefathers. But the imitatio Christi does not appear to include the mental and spiritual sacrifice which he had to undergo at the beginning of his career and without which he would never have become a saviour." (p.xxi, The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, OUP 1954).

There is no doubt that Father Kenny has included mental and spiritual sacrifice in his imitation of Christ. This book bears the marks of much study, meditation, and theological research.

Compared to many western countries, Australia is extremely conservative in most of its ways. In the Catholic Church in Australia, this is accentuated somewhat by the general influence of Irish Catholicism, which, despite its undeniable fecundity, is extremely conservative. In keeping with this environment, Fr. Kenny's book could be described as conservatively progressive, as opposed, say, to Fr. Kavanaugh's A Modern Priest Looks at his Outdated Church, currently running second only to J. K. Galbraith's The New Industrial State in the American non-fiction best seller lists.

Fr. Kavanaugh's book is radically progressive, and has not the theological depth of Fr. Kenny's, which, in this reviewer's opinion, deserves widespread study by Christians and non-Christians alike. A Christian who ignores this sort of book is not loyal to the prophetic and reforming traditions of Christianity, and a socialist who refuses to consider it is not loyal to his belief in the primacy of mass movements and social development. Catholicism is a mass movement, as a whole, and the progressives within it, though a minority, are also, on a world scale, a mass movement.

The book is divided into three major sections, dealing respectively with the Vatican 11 Council, the Church and Freedom, and the Church and Marriage. The text is succinctly broken up into manageable sections, and is presented in what might be called the modern manner, which
saves time, and aids comprehension. Many sections could be used to initiate discussions and debates. The book is theological enough to be interesting and colloquial enough to be comprehensible. This, in itself, is an achievement. The placing of the footnotes at the end of each section is a mistake, because one has to continually turn pages when reading. At the bottom of each page would have been better. Likewise, a glossary of terms would be a help to many. Not everyone knows terms such as 'kerygma', or 'eirenicism', much less the 'Gnosticism' (should be Gnosticism) on page 181.

The first section concerns itself with Vatican 11, and with contemporary Catholic theology. Vatican 11 highlighted a problem not peculiar to the Catholic Church, namely the role of national influence within an international field. Rome and Moscow are both centres of world-wide movements. In the hierarchy of each it undoubtedly helps if you speak Italian or Russian, to touch the problem only at its periphery. Likewise, the business capitals of the world, London and New York, require English. Whether the conservatives in these centres are called bureaucrats, organisation men or apparatchiks, they share certain traits, and the world over, are in frequent conflict with members of their movement seeking 'renewal'. There is a class or power struggle within all mass movements. Whether differences in ideology cause or are caused by these struggles, at any rate, they go hand in hand. These struggles can be either beneficial or destructive. In China and America at the moment, the struggles seem to be manifesting more destructive than beneficial characteristics, and it is fear of disintegration that lies at the bottom of many a conservative mind.

The western philosophical style, for some time, has been 'anti-metaphysical', and Fr. Kenny makes an eloquent and well thought out plea for freeing Catholic theology from metaphysics. However, it should be borne in mind that there are many kinds of metaphysics, and Fr. Kenny is only really objecting to one particular kind (the scholastic type, based on neo-Platonism modified by Aristotelian elements). Progressive Protestants have, for instance, made considerable use of the existentialist metaphysics of Martin Heidegger in opposing their orthodox traditions. But, more generally, it should be remembered that all western thought, since Greece, is in a certain sense metaphysical. Metaphysics is the 'style' of western thought, and this only becomes fully obvious when one compares it with traditional Indian and Chinese thought. These, respectively, have 'mystical' and 'ethical' styles. As an example of what difficulties this causes on the practical level, we have Vincent Cronin's excellent book The Wise Man from the West (Fontana Paperback), being the story of Matteo Ricci, the first Jesuit missionary in China. In the life of this early Jesuit, many of the points raised by Fr. Kenny are already in evidence.

The essay on Freedom raises questions that are of ever increasing concern to Catholic lay people, and the younger clergy. Behind this problem lurks a deeper one, that affects many ideological groups. Traditionally, ideological groups viewed the world dualistically. There was 'us', who were right, and there was 'them', who were wrong. The division was clear-cut, loyalty was a simple matter, and thought was moulded by this oversimplified pattern. The world was interpreted by a precise, dual standard. Progress and sophistication have made this position intolerable to many thinking people. These turn to a form of 'pluralism', in which, situationally at least, the world is made up of a number of groups, none of whom are always right, or always wrong, and who are all an essential part of over-
all reality, deserving respect. A Christian, of this persuasion, will see them all as part of Divine Providence, demanding love, while a Marxist will see them as part of the dialectics of matter and its social manifestations, to be taken seriously. To these people, an Inquisition, a Holy Office, a Cheka, or dogmatic rule by Commissars, is not the correct contemporary application of their ideology, be that Catholicism or Marxism. However, if one thing emerges from history, and from Fr. Kenny’s pages, it is that freedom is not just a romantic ideal, to be attained by barricades and manifestos, or nailing theses on a church door. Freedom in modern times means, among other things, a careful re-thinking of history and ideology. Its attainment will be a process of research, re-organisation, and promotion of dialogue.

The third section, on Marriage, is the most Catholic of all, because many of its problems exist only for Catholics. But, for them, these problems are very severe, and deserve outsiders’ sympathy rather than ridicule. There are two points in this section which are weak. One relates to the nature of marriage as a sacrament, within the Catholic sacramental system. Marriage is the only sacrament in which the recipients are also the ministers. A priest only witnesses a marriage for the Church. As the clergy are celibate, this sacrament is an entirely lay dominated one. Laymen, and laymen alone, administer and receive the sacrament of marriage, and yet have practically no say in its definition or interpretation. Fr. Kenny does not bring this important fact to the fore. The other weakness is that the major problem within marriage for many people is not mentioned. It is the female orgasm. Many women, caught between a socially acquired abhorrence of traditional contraceptives, and a personal fear of pregnancy, develop difficulties in achieving orgasm. The ramifications of this situation are very great, as anyone in the ‘marriage-counselling’ field will testify. Intercourse without orgasm is an extremely disturbing experience for most women, and leads to innumerable problems. It is at this point that the anovulants (pill) serve their greatest function. They remove the fear of pregnancy without evoking the guilt associated for many women with traditional contraceptives. This is a situation that merits a book similar to Fr. Kenny’s on its own.

The bibliography, good in what it lists, does not list enough. Pages of bibliography are never wasted. Among the books the reviewer feels could have been included are: Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes, Nesbit (especially Volume 3 on the Church); *Christian Existentialism—a Berdyaev Anthology*, Allan and Unwin 1965; *Church and State* by Luigi Sturzo, Geoffrey Bles 1936.

For Catholics this book will be both stimulating and informative, while for non-Catholics it gives an excellent review of the important struggles taking place within the Catholic Church of our time. Culturally it is a credit to Australia, and this reviewer hopes that it will receive the attention it deserves.

P. L. Eldar.


ANY factual account of the life of the ordinary people of China today is useful for an understanding of the essential material and spiritual motivation of the world’s biggest nation, Australia’s near neighbor.

Such accounts have become more important than ever in recent times, when US and Australian propaganda efforts to create an image of a hysterical people bent on aggressive expansion may appear to receive some
justification from the extravagant statements of leaders of the so-called cultural revolution.

In an interesting introduction of over 40 pages, Jan Myrdal describes the reasons why he sought and obtained permission to spend about a year in China, beginning in the Spring of 1962 with journeys in inner Mongolia and ending in Western Yunnan, with one whole autumn month—from mid-August to mid-September—spent in the village of Liu Ling, near Yenan in northern Shansi.

Among these reasons were his own intellectual, humanist and social attitudes arising from Sweden's strong free peasant traditions and based on a premise that human beings are, in the last analysis, rational, that they respond in a rational manner to an existing social and material reality.

During the four months in China that preceded his stay in Liu Ling, he had struggled to obtain a clear picture of the tremendous change resultant on the Chinese revolution, which he rightly calls "one of the great social and political upheavals of modern times."

As he says, the Chinese development is of such a character that it demands of each of us to understand why and how. But, though the literature on China is enormous, including many excellent and scholarly tomes, he lacked the one book he wanted to read; a factual, concrete account of one specific village, thus making the question of the village in general understandable.

So he obtained permission to live for a month in Liu Ling where, with the aid of two excellent interpreters, he patiently interviewed the villagers and made extensive, factual notes of their mode of life, organisations and ideas.

The resultant book, divided into 13 parts, with careful explanation of terms used and a good index, is the best and most detailed description of a Chinese village I have seen—better, for example, than Edgar Snow's The Other Side of the River, published in 1962 and also containing a description of Liu Ling.

It is not a study of the Chinese village in general and does not pretend to be. As the writer reminds us, China is a vast country and conditions can be extremely different in different parts of the country at the same time.

For instance, the peasants in this book do not mention the famine and agriculture catastrophe which followed the disastrous Great Leap Forward.

This, says the author, does not mean that famine did not exist—the food situation in China was precarious when he arrived there. But for several reasons, both climatic and political, the results were not so catastrophic in northern Shensi.

Nor will the reader find in the accounts of the village's progress by its 23 Communist Party and 24 Youth League members any of the violent criticism of the Soviet Union and modern revisionism which have become the hallmark of leaders of the cultural revolution. Their emphasis is on the tremendous, patient work done by the Chinese Party and Youth League in carrying the anti-Japanese resistance and social revolution through to victory, and on the construction work being done to consolidate and extend the people's gains from these great historical events.

The book is honest and objective— or, at least, as the author confesses, as honest as possible, bearing in mind that he is biased towards the ordinary people and that one of the aspects of Chinese civilisation he likes most is the respect it gives to work, both physical and intellectual. E. A. BACON.