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White Tie in Shanghai

FLIGHT FROM CHINA, by Edna Lee Booker
in collaboration with John S. Potter. Mac-
millan. \$2.50.

THIS book is mainly about life in that parasitic excrescence which flourished on the edge of the Chinese mainland—Shanghai. Called "the whore of Asia," and the "city of adventurers," Shanghai is actually a city of the world's greatest extremes of wealth and poverty.

Shanghai was the home of Edna Lee Booker for nearly twenty years. She loved it. She loved the ease and comfort which become the "right" of the whites implanted on a semi-colonial country. She was so completely happy in her own luxurious surroundings that she apparently did not notice the dead bodies which can be found any day on the streets through the cold winter months, end products of a callous exploitation of which her gay life was the fruit.

The life of Edna Lee Booker, wife of a prosperous American realtor, "centered in the homes, clubs, the Astor House, and the Old Carlton. Foreigners in comfortable circumstances lived in high-ceilinged homes, amid spreading gardens with old-fashioned English flower borders, perhaps a tennis court and stables, always a sheltered back garden for tea." Everywhere "Chinese servants, soft-voiced, soft-footed, in long white coats, sometimes topped with short sleeveless jackets of brocaded satin in rich henna, gold or blue, ran the establishments." Miss Booker's descriptions have a rather breathless, buoyant, readable dash.

And when in summertime Shanghai became uncomfortable this incredible foreign community migrated to "exclusive" beaches. The Potter family went to Weihaiwei where "life was primitive—yes. But we lived in gracious comfort and ease. There was a large staff to look after us. Besides the servants we had brought from Shanghai, we engaged locally a caretaker, a gardener, two sampan coolies who served also as carriers of water, a carriage driver, and, most lowly of all, a coolie who came morning, noon and night to empty and clean the *mo-doong* (boxed-in commode) in each bathroom." Through the constant use of pidgin English Miss Booker's Chinese are made to appear quaint, amusing and devoted to their masters, in a relationship similar to that of Southern "gentlemen" with their quaint Sambos. In more serious passages, this lady from democratic America pays tribute to British imperialism, which

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controlled Weihaiwei as a leased territory.

Miss Booker's narrative ends with Pearl Harbor and is taken up by her husband, who describes in a matter-of-fact way what happened to him from the morning of December 8, 1941 until his repatriation on the *Gripsholm*. The most remarkable thing about it is that even the fascist brutalities of the Japanese did not budge the old China hands. They accepted their new position with aristocratic stoicism and showed remarkable doggedness in preserving what they could of their privileged life.

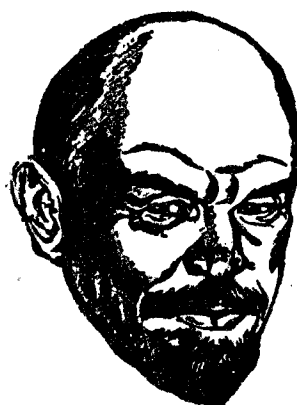
After the arrival of the Japanese, Shanghai business came to a standstill and the foreign community stayed quietly at home until they were pushed into the internment camps. There they tried to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances allowed. "It did not take long after entering camp for various groups to make up private messes. The four of us in our mess, after receiving our camp chow from the pots and baskets in the dining hall, would go upstairs to the space alongside Storms' bed where we had a card table. . . . Three camp chairs and the edge of the bed seated us. We set our table, which boasted a cloth and serviettes that one of us had thought to put into his trunk." What a pity someone had not had the foresight to bring a black tie and dinner jacket!

The caste system was kept up. The *taipans* (heads of commercial firms) remained *taipans*, and kept clear of what Mr. Potter and his friends called the "dead-end boys." There is a suggestion that the latter did not take their position lying down. When repatriation came and they were bound for home the smouldering resentment burst out. Mr. Potter's diary says at one point, "This afternoon one group of loafers in hold began talking against upper classes. Wonder how so many got repatriation and many deserving men left behind. Repatriation was in classes: officials, women, children, sick, aged, then men who had sent families home in 1940 when Washington advised. Exceptions may account for some roughs included on this." Mr. Potter does not state in which class he was included.

There is not one word of resistance. No one apparently made any effort to leave Shanghai and escape to the China mainland after the Japanese came in. There was nothing more than a negative effort to preserve what could be preserved of an easy living.

Shanghai is now back in Chinese

NM January 8, 1946



1870

1924

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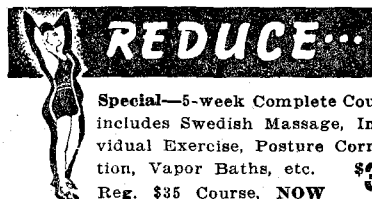
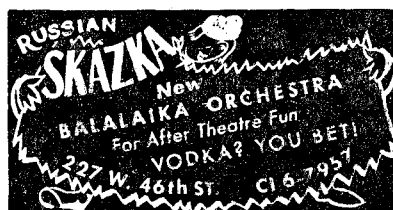
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hands. But the old Shanghai—"the foreigners' paradise"—will not return if the Chinese people can help it. Who can be sorry? EDITH CROMWELL.

Brief Reviews

LETTERS FROM THE DESERT, by Moshe Mosen-
son. Sharon Press. \$2.

ONE of the great sagas is that of the Jewish Brigade, made up of Palestinian Jews, which fought in the British Army. Part of the story was told in the pamphlet *Soldiers of Judea*, reviewed in NM, July 10. Now comes a more intimate story in the form of letters from one of the soldiers. Mr. Mosen-son, a member of a "Kvutza" (cooperative farm community), left wife and child to enlist in 1940. He was one of many thousands confined to service bat-talions, in which the Jewish soldiers served valiantly, asking for, and finally winning, begrudged permission to serve as line soldiers.

Mosen-son's letters furnish a sensitive picture of the hardships endured in the desert, not the least of which was the discrimination they were subjected to, discrimination even while giving their lives. One can compare their treatment only with that of the Negro soldiers in our Army.

THE PAN AMERICAN YEARBOOK: 1945. Pan
American Associates. \$5.

THIS is a useful reference book if if you don't mind getting your facts about Latin America in static form. Designed primarily for international traders, the work naturally steers clear of material that would frighten them or tell them a little of the reasons for the incredibly low standard of living that dominates the continent. Thus what you get is a good deal on geog-raphy, capital cities, exchange value of currencies, exports and imports. There is a trickle of information on labor, but its value is negligible. The drifts and currents of Latin American politics are ignored almost completely. Argentina's Peron is mentioned, for example, but how he got to be the big fascist boss and why is totally missing. The whole ap-proach is not to offend anyone with critical analyses or for that matter not to tell a complete story for fear that it may.

Worth Noting

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January 8, 1946 **NM**