

Turkish History

THE DARK MOMENT. By Ann Bridge. New York: The Macmillan Co. 337 pp. \$3.75.

By JOSEPH HITREC

ANN BRIDGE's name as a storyteller of exotic places rests mainly on two early novels, "Peking Picnic" and "Illyrian Spring." The first was a spacious chronicle of a party of English people on a trip to the Chinese interior in the days of warlords; the second a psychological drama set in the Dalmatian mountains. In her latest novel, "The Dark Moment," she unfurls her special brand of flag on yet another little known territory—Turkey. Moreover, her purpose is not merely fictional. It is to tell the reader about the death rattle of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the modern Turkish Republic.

That is rather a huge undertaking, and, when all is said and done, I am not sure that her enthusiasm isn't perhaps the most affecting thing in the whole prodigious toil. To fictionalize a nation in the throes of one of the most drastic changes of modern times would in any case seem to call for a variety of talents. Ann Bridge's answer is a kind of panoramic-heroic narrative that we have become used to in Upton Sinclair and Jules Romains; but that is also the full extent of any similarity.

Miss Bridge opens her story just before the Sarajevo assassination, in the well-to-do household of Asaf Pasha, an influential Istanbul landowner under the last Sultan. The family is largely female, and among them the daughter, Feride, appears singled out for bigger things. The outbreak of the First World War has an electrifying effect on them, and there is just enough time to marry Feride off to a young man before he and Feride's own brother leave for the front to serve under General Mustapha Kemal. Soon the war turns badly for Germany and Turkey, Mustapha Kemal breaks with the Sultanate and is recruiting his own nationalist army and government in Ankara. Feride's husband and brother have become the general's ADCs.

Together with her sister-in-law, Nilufer, Feride decides to join her husband, but the way to that remote Anatolian city lies through the Black Sea and past several mountain ranges, which is exceedingly rough even on two Turkish girls fired with the zeal of revolution. When they get to Ankara, they plunge into the work of the Red Cross. The rest of their story un-



—Bassano.

Ann Bridge—"prodigious toil."

folds contrapuntally with Kemal's final apostasy from the Sultanate and with the nationalist campaign against the Greeks that is to mark the beginning of the Turkish Republic's independence. With the war over and the treaties signed, the girls are also asked to spearhead Kemal's drive for the emancipation of women. Thus, hurriedly and not without pangs of regret, the twentieth century is ushered in in Anatolia to the general lowering of veils and waving of incongruous panama hats.

If the polite dragoman prose of Ann Bridge does not exactly make for a vigorous story and characterization, there is enough genuine suspense in the historical events themselves. And if you do want to know just what happened in Anatolia between 1914 and 1920 and why it was a good thing it did, "The Dark Moment" is your book—a pleasant, sincere, and exceptionally well-informed one.



—Louis Faurer.

Frederick Buechner—"light treatment."

Vision from God

THE SEASONS' DIFFERENCE. By Frederick Buechner. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 303 pp. \$3.50.

By OLIVER LA FARGE

THE subject of this novel is the effect, upon an unspiritual group of adults and a number of assorted children, of the firm belief on the part of another adult that he has experienced a vision from God. The story moves on two levels, often parallel, sometimes intersecting, that of the grown people and that of the children.

The possibilities are considerable, even for the determinedly light treatment Mr. Buechner has chosen, but few of them are realized. On the adult level, the vision, which may or may not have actually occurred, and the characters' interrelationships with each other and with the children, all rather bloodless, produce a vast deal of talk, little of which is really interesting. There is also a lot of eccentric behavior, and one feels that this is brought in in an attempt to create interest and give body to a story which is inherently thin.

The part that centers upon the children is better. The children on the whole are alive, real, and well observed, although at moments they become stock children rather than individual creations. Their eccentricities set well upon them; they are at the ages for them, and they hold the reader's interest more solidly.

Mr. Buechner has a real creation in the two "Uglies," the adolescent boys who look upon themselves as set apart and doomed. Their supremely innocent pseudo-sophistication, their secret codes of speech and action, and their outlook on the world are convincing, engaging, and touching. In the last analysis these are the only characters that stay alive all through the book.

The story is told in a highly Mandarin style, or perhaps I should say would-be Mandarin. Sentences are involved, loaded with clauses, and stopped up with parenthetical remarks. Unfortunately, the author is not enough of a master of syntax to pull off the trick. Again and again he turns out sentences that must be read twice to be understood—which means that they are not worth reading twice. One who would write elaborately, Manderinly, Gothically, must have com-

Oliver La Farge's novels include "Laughing Boy," which won a Pulitzer Prize, and "All the Young Men."

plete mastery of the English language. Mr. Buechner, alas, is not even always certain just what a word means. He should, for instance, get a dictionary and find out the meaning of "disinterested."

"The Seasons' Difference" starts with promise. Again and again it looks as if the promise were going to be fulfilled. There are moments when it lights up brightly, and one thinks, at last he has hit his stride—but always, somehow, the light goes out again. It is one of those most tantalizing of all things in writing—a near miss.

Fiction Notes

STEPHEN HAYNE. By Albert Idell. William Sloane. \$3.50. With his new novel Albert Idell tackles somewhat more robust material than in his popular trilogy which began with "Centennial Summer" and ended with "The Great Blizzard." In "Stephen Hayne" he treats of an America shifting, in the post-Civil War period, from an era of farming to an era of developing industrialization. Stephen Hayne, returned from the wars, determines quickly that the future for him as for America no longer lies in farming. He moves through work in the Pennsylvania coal mines into the Philadelphia world of money manipulation, stock-market grabs, trade-union fighting, and railroad swindling to become a power in the age of industry. In its central structure his story is the simple, rather old-fashioned, success fable which, for a long time, was standard in American fiction. What redeems Mr. Idell's treatment is the fact that he has taken a long, hard look at the witch-hunts and prejudices which were mobilized against the immigrant laborer and nascent trade-unionism in this earlier period of American history.

The conflict that this sets up in the mind of his hero is rather romantically and therefore unsatisfactorily resolved, but meanwhile he gives us some of the facts of pertinence to our present period of threatening McCarthyism.

THE SILVER YOKE. By Sylvia Chatfield Bates. McGraw-Hill. \$3.50. Sylvia Chatfield Bates, a skilled practitioner in the field of slick fiction, has here taken some improbable and, I'm afraid, intractable materials as the base for her new effort. On one level there is that rather old-fashioned device of the identical twins—in this case Lillie and Millie—who are both ravishingly beautiful, but who get mistaken for each other and so get in each other's way and lead a very com-

plicated and unhappy love life. A good soap opera could be constructed around this situation, and I'm not sure it hasn't been. Miss Bates, however, has not been content to leave well enough alone. Taking her cue from the rather more obvious textbooks on abnormal psychology, she has explored at somewhat tedious length the possible mental aberrations that might result. Millie, it turns out, develops into a sadistic witch, and Lillie—our heroine—shows a rather frightening tendency to slip over the borderline into a schizophrenic state where she doesn't know whether she's Lillie or Millie. This confuses not only the reader but also her lover and leads to even more plot complications. All is resolved when Lillie, with the obvious approval of the author, frees herself by killing off Millie and, presumably, lives happily ever afterward. This particular wedding of Victorian melodrama with modern psychology does not, you will have gathered, quite come off.

FULL CARGO. By Wilbur Daniel Steele. Doubleday. \$3.95. Time and deliberation will perhaps determine why one of the most accomplished craftsmen of the American short story has always fallen just short of the highest achievement and been accorded much less attention than his undoubted talents deserve. Here are

nineteen more of Wilbur Daniel Steele's short stories, a worthy follow-up to his earlier collection of "best" stories. None here has quite the intense memorability of "How Beautiful with Shoes." But you will not want to miss "Sailor! Sailor!," "The Gray Goose," or "Never Anything That Fades." Even when his contrivances are a little too artful—as in "The Thinker," "Six Dollars," and "Renegade"—Mr. Steele manages to be persuasive. He's an old-fashioned storyteller, but he tells some of the best stories you're likely to hear.

THE PLUNDERERS. By Georges Blonde. Translated by Frances Frenaye. Macmillan. \$3.50. Here is a rare and unusual novel. Georges Blond has taken the story of the first wholesale plundering of the Pacific Arctic for its seal skins in the time of Catherine the Great and made of it a moving and mystical epic. There are overtones here of Melville, some of the majesty of his seascapes, some of the irony with which he pitted man against elemental nature. The tale is simple: In the late 1700's Sila Ivanovich Shayfrin sets out with a small fleet of fishing boats for the uncharted breeding islands of the seals in the North Pacific. Betrayed by the rapacity of his mutinous men he dies in the sea he had unwittingly plundered. M. Blond

(Continued on page 62)



—From the jacket design of "The Plunderers."