

and traveled as a private individual, on his own, without assignment. Contrary to his fears, he was allowed to photograph freely. The 163 photographs show no political angle. His concern was with the common people, at work and at play, in the city and the country, at home and in the factory. Officialdom hardly appears beyond the series of photographs of the never-ending queue of people waiting their turns to enter the mausoleum where are preserved the bodies of Lenin and Stalin, and a single picture of Malenkov and Khrushchev with other officials at a sport demonstration. The photographs show the Russians as an industrious, well-to-do, and apparently happy people. The book is a workmanlike report, but none of the pictures reaches the expressive height of some of the photographs in "The Europeans."

Richard Lannoy's "India" is more exhaustive. He has written, by way of introduction, an historical essay, and the 188 photographs cover an extensive territory. This is Mr. Lannoy's first book, and in the course of making it he found India so much to his liking that he has gone back there to make his home. This love for India shows in almost every photograph. Compared to Cartier-Bresson's work, however, the photographs lack sharpness of perception, awareness of form, and wit.

"Japan," regrettably, is the last book of the gifted Swiss photographer Werner Bischof. He had barely finished the layout when he was killed last year in an automobile accident. There is more beauty in his book than in the other three, perhaps because of the subject matter, but more likely because of the photographer's attitude. He seeks to interpret for us not so much the individual Japanese, but their way of life, and divides the 109 photographs into Old Japan and Japan Today, contrasting the two attitudes which are so characteristic of that country. It is a moving record, less brilliant than Cartier-Bresson's books, less informational than Lannoy's, but perhaps the most sympathetic to his subjects of all of them. In color Bischof was superb, and the many color reproductions stand out above his black-and-white work.

FICTION

Fifteen on a Rock

"Boon Island," by Kenneth Roberts (Doubleday. 275 pp. \$3.75), is the story of fifteen Britons who were shipwrecked off the coast of Maine during the eighteenth century and of the struggle for survival that ensued.

By W. R. Burnett

IN THE winter of 1710 a British merchant ship, the galley *Nottingham*, 135 days out of Greenwich, driving before a northeaster, ran aground and was wrecked on a small, uninhabited island half a dozen miles off the coast of Maine. The master of the galley, John Dean, and a crew of fourteen men, including the supercargo, Miles Whitworth, former student at Oxford, and Neal Butler, a boy actor, and his father, the old seaman known as Swede, manage to get safely from the smashed galley to this precarious shelf of rock called Boon Island, hardly more than a dot on the tremendous sea-horizon of the North Atlantic. At high tide this rocky shelf is always in danger of having the breakers sweep completely over it. The cold is intense and there is no shelter, except for a few shallow caves. The men cannot build a fire because everything is wet, and stays wet. They have nothing to eat except for a few pounds of cheese that drift in from the cargo of the wrecked galley. Their lives seem not to be worth a plugged nickel. But they manage, by hook or crook, to survive until rescued—and that is the story of Kenneth Roberts's new novel, "Boon Island."

But not quite the whole story. The opening in Greenwich, England, is not nearly as simple as the rest of the adventure. Neal Butler, the boy actor, runs into trouble with one of the aristocratic habitués of the theatre at Greenwich, a homosexual, whose advances become violent. The boy, in a panic, kills the painted fop

with a knife and is forced to get away from England at once. He is hidden aboard the *Nottingham*, under the protection of his father and Miles Whitworth.

At first thought this episode may seem out of key with the rest of the story—and even completely unnecessary. But it is evident that it was part of Mr. Roberts's purpose in writing this story to contrast what he conceives as the "good life" with what he conceives as the "bad life." And an easy antithesis was ready to hand: Roaring, amoral, and effete eighteenth-century London contrasted with simple, kindly, hardworking, pioneer America. The aristocratic homosexual as against Richard Nason, the sea captain, who is instrumental in rescuing the castaways from Boon Island.

To me the contrast seems a little too elementary, too simple, and as a general thing Mr. Roberts's rather belligerent moralizing disturbs me for the same reason. One of the characters, the mate, Langman, is an obvious whipping-boy for the author—and nothing more than that. Here is no Long John Silver, that plausible and amusing but unrelievedly evil man strong in his own convictions; no murderous Pew—but a sort of walking morality on whose head Mr. Roberts empties his displeasure, as follows: "Unfortunately there'll always be Langmans in this world to set people and nations against each other—to condemn the good and extol the bad—to spread sly rumors and spit on the truth."

Yet in the story itself Langman does nothing at all but talk, and seems a very feeble creature indeed.

IN A critical sense this would be carping except for the fact that Mr. Roberts himself insists that the story is no mere recital of daring adventure and endurance, but an allegory; and the book closes on the following note: "How many of us have our Boon Islands? And how many have our Langmans? But doesn't each one of us have an inner America on which in youth his heart is set; and if—because of age, or greed, or weakness, or circumstances beyond his poor control—it escapes him, his life, it seems to me, has been wasted."

But let's forget that angle. Very



few people are going to read this story as an allegory. Most of them are going to read it for its wonderful descriptions of men brought to the last extremity by privation till they become so reduced in the human scale that cannibalism seems quite natural to them, and they feast contentedly off the body of one of their dead comrades. They are going to be fascinated by the island itself, which little by little and with growing portentousness becomes the chief character in this nightmare of survival—Boon Island with its constantly thundering breakers, its rocky bleakness, its arctic cold, its few screaming gulls, and its cautious and agile seals which effortlessly evade the weak grasps of the starving mariners. Once you've read this powerful story the barren rocky island will become a part of your inner consciousness—you'll never forget it.

"Boon Island" is definitely in the tradition of "Treasure Island," "Robinson Crusoe," and the *Bounty* trilogy. Its chief lack is in the realm of character: there are no Silvers, no Crusoes, no Captain Blighs here, not even a Fletcher Christian or a man Friday; the actors in this savage drama are hardly more than names. But where Mr. Roberts excels is in his sober and powerful depiction of the inescapable realities of the situation. He flinches from nothing.

Speaking for myself—and with the above rather stringent reservations fully in mind—"Boon Island" goes on the shelf with the three stories mentioned and also with Joseph Conrad's subtle study of the effects of cannibalism, "Falk."

Labyrinth in Copenhagen

"The Red Umbrellas," by Kelvin Lindemann (*Appleton-Century-Crofts*, 214 pp. \$3.50), the work of a Danish writer, is a volume of short, strange, and romantic tales bound together in a complex and highly original literary form.

By William Peden

"THE RED UMBRELLAS" is Kelvin Lindemann's third novel, but the first to appear in this country; it more than justifies the rather extravagant acclaim the author has received in his native Denmark. If it can be called a novel at all, "The Red Umbrellas" exists completely outside the contemporary realistic tradition. It is, rather, a series of superbly artificial and mutually interdependent short stories set within the framework of nineteenth-century Copenhagen when the Asiatic cholera ran riot through this proud and lovely city. Here, in the very midst of the temporary lazarettes that festered within the Danish capital, three people meet in the Louis Quinze salon of the Marchioness Hermione Schnell, a very aged aristocrat who had "outlived her period and walked through its ruins like Scipio through Carthage." Her two guests are a celebrated Danish scientist, Professor Charles Iselin, and her

lifelong friend, Madame Conradine van der Hooglant. The three, each with his own secret desires, fears, and burning memories, have gathered together to celebrate the Professor's birthday. During the evening they tell the romantic, highly-involved, fantastically-complicated stories that constitute the major portion of this unusual book.

The plotting of "The Red Umbrellas" is as involved as the maze of the Minotaur; the characters are simultaneously as real and as unreal as the horn of a unicorn. Coincidence is piled upon coincidence; story emerges within story; one anecdote leads to another, in what at first reading appears to be a meaningless kaleidoscope of recollection, observation, and speculation. Yet there is a key to the labyrinth. After the bewildering richness of the stories, after a late-evening sojourn to the heart of the beleaguered city, after all the character relationships have been suggested, and reversed, and then once again reversed—after all this, the pieces of the puzzle fall suddenly into harmony; the revelation is made manifest.

The stories related by the three indefatigable narrators range far and wide in time and place; their characters run the gamut from Marie Antoinette and the Devil to Copenhagen's shabbiest pandar. It is difficult to resist referring to the individual figures in this richly-colored tapestry: the English lord whose suicide note read simply "Too many buttons to button and unbutton"; beautiful Charlotte Corday and how she obtained the knife with which she murdered Citizen Marat, Charlotte whose loveliness was such that her executioner could not resist pinching the fair cheek of her severed head; the romantic Count Ferson, who received the talismanic red umbrella from Marie Antoinette; the goose who polished the most celebrated diamonds of the generation and the donkey whose death altered the course of history.

It is little wonder that in this pot-pourri of story, history, legend, and folklore we sometimes lose sight of the Marchioness and her guests. "The Red Umbrellas" is a feast for the discerning reader; if one overindulges is the host or the guest the villain?

