

One With the World

Maiden Voyages: A Lively Guide for the Woman Traveler, by Rochelle Girson (Harcourt, Brace & World. 245 pp. + Appendix and Index. \$5.75), shares the joys and jolts experienced by SR's book review editor while journeying about four continents. Co-author with Cornelia Otis Skinner of "Our Hearts Were Young and Gay," Emily Kimbrough has also written about her holidays abroad in "Forever Old, Forever New: Travel in Greece," "Pleasure by the Busload," "Water, Water Everywhere," and "So Near and Yet So Far."

By EMILY KIMBROUGH

ANY WOMAN, if she is like Rochelle Girson, can travel alone anywhere. I should like a show of hands from those who could do this: Duffel bag in hand, Miss Girson on foot left a hotel at Ibarra in Ecuador to catch a bus to the Otavalo fair at half past four in the morning. She could hear, and see in the moonlight, an Indian following her. However, sprinting she reached the bus stand before he caught up.

The crowd waiting there deflected his pursuit. She pushed her way onto the

A belly-flop into the Otavalo mud—a raisin-eyed Indian boy to the rescue.

—Photographed in Ecuador by Rochelle Girson.



bus; a local woman "carrying a huge bundle lost her footing and fell flat against the steep steps, which did not deter a big man from using her as a ladder. . . . When the bus halted at Otavalo, the passengers poured out. The Indians were clustered nearby as I stumbled off the high bottom step and took a belly-flop into the mud—a comedy turn that convulsed them. A raisin-eyed Indian boy helped me up, slung the strap of my flight bag over his shoulder, and said to me in Spanish that he would be my guide. He told me his name was Manuel Dias and that he had eight years. I blotted up as much of the mud as I could with a tissue, smiled at the Indians to show that I, too, liked a good laugh, and, heigh-ho, we were off to the fair."

All those who raised hands may now follow Miss Girson. She will lead you and, anticipating every exigency, great or small, show you how to emerge triumphant and solvent. All you need provide, beyond what she advises, are fortitude, energy, and fearlessness.

Miss Girson did not set out to be a solitary traveler, but after a shakedown cruise she eliminated companions because they overweighed her. Solo she could do more, move faster, and make new friends more widely and frequently.

A woman standing alone with bags too heavy to carry and no taxi in sight will attract a man without sinister purpose—on his part. He only wants to help the helpless little creature. If that journey's end is the deposit of her bags at the hotel, and dinner or drinks at a café not suitable for an unescorted woman, his purpose and hers have been happily achieved.

For a number of years I have put in a notebook practical suggestions as I have come upon them in travel books. As I read *Maiden Voyages* I started to extract items for my list. I began to lag around page sixteen. At page twenty-three I gave up: I was transposing the whole book longhand to my memorandum pad. I have never found so much travel information packed so solidly into such a modest container—245 pages.

In addition to the hardy show-of-hands group who will follow this blazer of a single-file trail, there is the middle-of-the-road traveler who likes a companion on either side. I belong here. After saying where I would like to go, I want someone else to do the mapping

out. This is partly because I cannot read maps, and partly because I am easily confused by timetables. I winced when I read how much money Miss Girson tells me I could save by doing without the services of a travel agent, but realistically I know that the price of incompetence has to be included in my budget.

There is a third group of travelers. It is made up of the stay-at-homes, who have little opportunity to go away but who take flight or ship vicariously, by reading. They are not interested in the minutiae of transportation. They like to know what happened when the writer got there. A great deal happens to Miss Girson.

Maiden Voyages belongs to all these groups. The reason for this wide membership is Miss Girson's capacity for enjoyment. She relishes what she sees, hears, even smells, and relishes her preparations for enjoyment. Hers is an invitation to laughter, frequently audible, and to learning—in practical areas. She expects you to do your reading elsewhere for history and art.

She does not want me for a companion and, frankly, I do not want her; I have neither her stamina nor digestion; but I will not travel again without *Maiden Voyages* by my side.

ALTHOUGH I MISSED HAVING *manna* in the Fertile Crescent, I did try *sangat*, an unleavened Persian bread that looks like whole-wheat matzo and tastes like damp ones. Isfahan bakeries festoon their fronts with them—evidently not to dry out. In Egypt, as an appetizer, one dips folds of *pita*, a similar pancake, into *homos*, which is a paste of chick-peas diluted with one of *tehina*, and that's sesame seeds puréed with water.

The whole Middle East has marvelous kebabs, which means any grilled meat (the "shish" is the skewer). The Iranians distill the petals of the damask rose and other blossoms to flavor their puddings and sweets, and are fond of throwing cherries, apples, nuts, and a variety of dried fruit into their *khoreshes*, or stews. One of them—*Mullah Ghas Kardeh* (Swooned Priest)—is said to be so succulent that the *mullah* fainted from the joy of eating it. The Turks, who claim to have invented the kebab, have a dish called *Imam Bayildi* composed of the same ingredients—eggplant, onions, and tomatoes—that *their* prayer leader, the *imam*, liked so much he also fainted. (I get a bit of vertigo myself from eggplant.) Regardless of who was its innovator, the Turks win hands down with the most sensual-sounding victuals: e.g., a typical dessert, *Kadin Göbeği*, or Lady's Navel, and *Kadin Budu*, Lady's Thighs, which is meatballs.

—From the book.

Mail from the Front

Letters from Vietnam, edited by Bill Adler (Dutton. 212 pp. \$3.95), and **The Letters of Pfc. Richard E. Marks, USMC** (Lippincott. 190 pp. \$3.95), display a spectrum of attitudes toward the war, from idealistic conviction to embittered resignation. Orville Prescott was for many years book critic on *The New York Times*.

By ORVILLE PRESCOTT

"THE SERGEANT said it's a dirty war, but it's kill or be killed." A sentence like this could have been written by a soldier on either side in the Punic Wars. It was written by a young American in Vietnam, and may be found in an interesting and quietly moving book called *Letters from Vietnam*, edited by Bill Adler.

Most books about our participation in Vietnam are produced either by reporters or by polemicists attacking or defending our presence in that unhappy land. The men who fight and die there are rarely heard from. Mr. Adler, who runs his own assembly line turning out books of letters, has here created a volume that lets the men on the spot speak for themselves. They do so, frankly, bitterly, eloquently. The result is unpretentious and almost casual, but a genuine contribution to the literature of war.

All branches of the armed services and all ranks from general to private are represented here, as well as Red Cross nurses and members of the International Voluntary Services. They discuss rain, heat, insects, exhaustion, boredom, combat, death, and the people of Vietnam. Sometimes they write with crude humor, sometimes with shock.

The many men that died, I will never forget. The odor of blood and decayed bodies, I will never forget. I am all right. I will never be the same though, never, never, never. If I have to go into battle again, if I am not killed, I will come out insane. I cannot see and go through it again, I know I can't. The friends I lost and the many bodies I carried back to the helicopters to be lifted out, I will never forget.

Few of the letters are as sad as this. Most are grim and resigned. Some are bitter about corruption, inertia, and ingratitude in Vietnam, or mismanagement in Washington, or "the punks at home" who protest against the war. Many of the writers pity the Vietnamese

and are sincerely attached to individuals, particularly children. Most of them, if they discuss the issue at all, are convinced of the righteousness of the cause for which they are fighting. To them it is just as important to die for liberty in Vietnam as it was to die in Korea, Okinawa, France, and Germany.

In our present perplexed and confused time, when all causes are questioned and all motives are suspected, many well-informed and thoughtful people are convinced that the United States should not be fighting in Vietnam; and so are many ignorant and hysterical people. Idealistic belief in the value of sacrifice, old-fashioned patriotism, and unquestioning courage are not often encountered. But in this book there is a series of letters from fathers trying to explain to their children why they are fighting on the other side of the world. Whether their reasoning is sound may be debatable. The nobility of their motives is not.

Several of the writers describe the

gratitude of villagers to the Americans who drove out the Viet Cong masters; a number of letters from Vietnamese expressing thanks for American help and sacrifice are quoted. Other letters are skeptical, doubtful, embittered. A few Americans are disgusted by the behavior of the Vietnamese, and also by that of their compatriots. One quotes a Vietnamese friend: "Why do you make Communists of our men, prostitutes of our women, and beggars of our children? Do you do this at home?" Such different points of view make *Letters from Vietnam* provocative.

The Letters of PFC Richard E. Marks, USMC tells little about the war and much about a brash and confused but cheerful and likable prep school dropout who enlisted in the Marines and fifteen months later was killed in Vietnam. Young Rick Marks had trouble with English grammar and sprayed his hasty notes with misspellings. Candid, affectionate, courageous, Rick did a lot of growing up in the Marines and more under combat conditions in Vietnam. There is considerable psychological interest in these letters, as well as much repetition and trivia. And, of course, there is the tragedy of the war itself, which ended Rick's life at nineteen, just when he had overcome the troubles of his adolescence and was displaying an admirable maturity.

A new novel by
Christopher Isherwood



A MEETING BY THE RIVER

In which a rich and sybaritic Londoner whose younger brother is about to take final vows in a Hindu monastery attempts to persuade, charm, bludgeon or trick him into returning to the world.

\$4.50. Published by SIMON AND SCHUSTER

