

is rather original and interesting. The author evades the real difficulties of her subject, by having a good many things happen off-stage; and she piles up the agony unscrupulously to secure an impressive climax; moreover, she never lets Jim's wife appear in her own defence, but keeps her just out of sight, to be taken on faith, like a nursery bogy. No matter; the whole book, with its earnest muddle of melodrama, propaganda, ingenuousness and ingenuity, is quite readable.

Simplicity is a highly desirable quality in fiction, but like all good things, it may be overdone. Knut Hamsun's "Benoni" suffers from this excess of merit. In "Growth of the Soil" Hamsun's method was ideally fitted to his subject. Isak, the pioneer farmer, was realized as an elemental force, possessed of the instinctive wisdom by which the leaves put forth in spring and the wild creatures know their paths. Hamsun understands the processes of nature.

The mysteries of business are beyond his comprehension. He nearly starved to death here in America, when he was a young man, which indicates a singular incapacity in any industrial effort. Anyhow, in "Benoni" he makes it plain that he believes success in money matters can only be owing to either of two causes, luck or sharp practice. By sheer blind luck, the peasant fisherman, Benoni, acquired a fishing schooner, a house, shops and wharves; and finally forty thousand dollars in cash fell into his hands for the mineral rights of a heap of rocks he had bought for next to nothing. But he got very little benefit of it all; it could not widen his range of satisfactions, nor even win him the girl he wanted, the minister's daughter. And he was always an easy prey of the local banker, one of the sharp gentry.

Except for the unreality of the financial deals, "Benoni" is a faithful and therefore slightly dull transcript of the daily and yearly round of existence in a Norway fishing village. Apparently it is the first of two volumes; the second will be awaited patiently.

The Crystal Cup. By Gertrude Atherton. Boni and Liveright.
Lewis and Irene. By Paul Morand. Boni and Liveright.
Firecrackers. By Carl Van Vechten. Alfred A. Knopf.
Old Youth. By Coningsby Dawson. Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.
The Kenworthys. By Margaret Wilson. Harper and Brothers.
Benoni. By Knut Hamsun. Alfred A. Knopf.

MODERN SPANISH LITERATURE

By Ernest Boyd

THE standard history of Spanish literature, both in Spanish and in English, is Mr. Fitzmaurice Kelly's familiar tome, but even in its most recent edition this work is entirely inadequate in its treatment of contemporary authors. In French and German there are similar histories, written by professors, with the usual incoherent last chapter, in which living writers are mentioned at haphazard and accorded a non-committal line or two. It was in order to remedy this peculiar state of affairs, largely due to the lack in Spain itself of a competent and succinct account of Spanish literature in the last half century, that Mr. Bell was invited to write the present work. Mr. Bell is the author of an excellent history of Portuguese literature; he has written extensively about Spain and things Spanish, and he is one of those Englishmen, like Fitzmaurice Kelly and Crawford Flitch, who have devoted their

lives to the intensive study of the life and literature of the Iberian Peninsula. His name is a guarantee of scholarship combined with intimate first hand knowledge.

Mr. Bell wisely confines himself to the Castilian writers, that is to say, he makes no attempt to discuss Basque and Catalan literatures; and the dialect writers of Murcia, Valencia and Extremadura, as well as the Latin Americans, receive only passing mention when their work bears upon the main development of Castilian. He divides the modern period into two parts, "hinging respectively on the cardinal years 1868 and 1898", and his survey extends from Pereda to Ramón Gómez de la Serna, with five main divisions treating of "The Novel", "The Drama", "Lyric Poetry", "The Essay" and "Criticism and Scholarship". The author's desire for comprehensiveness has resulted in the inclusion of names at the close of each section which have no more than a catalogue interest, as Mr. Bell does not deem them important enough to give them space for comment. So far as the average reader is concerned, these might well have been omitted, and even students of Spanish will not be greatly enlightened by such references as he can give them.

Save for this negligible objection, no fault can be found with Mr. Bell's history. In his treatment of writers worthy of detailed comment, his choice, his sense of proportion, and his critical estimates are admirable. What will at once strike the American reader, who is not a specialist, is the extent to which the best contemporary prose writers have been translated, and, consequently, the great helpfulness of this book in arriving at some general perspective of their importance. The novel of the 1868 period, for example, is represented

by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, José María de Pereda, Pérez Galdós, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Juan Valera and the surviving Armando Palacio Valdés. With the exception of Pereda, all of these authors were made available for American readers in the late 'eighties and 'nineties. Alarcón's "Three Cornered Hat" even enjoyed a renewed lease of life a couple of years ago, when a new translation of it was issued and met with unexpectedly popular success. Mr. Bell, however, rightly stresses the prime importance of Galdós in this group. He is indubitably "the father" of modern Spanish fiction.

The strictly "modern" period is, of course, that which began with the generation of 1898. Here again America has been well served by the translators, for, of the novelists, dramatists and essayists singled out for detailed discussion by Mr. Bell, the following are available in English: Pío Baroja, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Ricardo León, Blasco Ibáñez, Gabriel Miró, Miguel de Unamuno, Jacinto Benavente, Azorín, Martínez Sierra, and Concha Espina. It is true that only the worst of these, to wit, Blasco Ibáñez, has really captured the affections of the American public, but the Spaniards cannot say that a serious effort has not been made to introduce their best literature into North America. Mr. Bell is more tender towards Blasco Ibáñez than most authoritative critics, but he does admit that "La Barraca" and "Cañas y Barro" — books with no vogue in English — are his best work.

The two most undeservedly neglected writers, Pérez de Ayala and Pío Baroja, however, are singled out for special praise, and if Mr. Bell succeeds in sending American readers to the translations of these novelists he will not have lived in vain. Such, indeed, should be the general effect of Mr.

Bell's history, for he has written with learning and infectious enthusiasm a book which has more than the advantage of being the first in the field.

Contemporary Spanish Literature. By Aubrey F. G. Bell. Alfred A. Knopf.

THE DEVOTION OF JOHN G. NEIHARDT

By Frank Luther Mott

IN a little village out in the Ozarks, John G. Neihardt is engaged in writing an epic cycle of the American frontier. The task is one calling for the highest powers; yet Neihardt is a very unostentatious sort of man, a lover of informality, disciple of the simple and the real. Short in stature, he would not be noticed in a crowd; but let him take off his slouch hat and look you in the eyes, and you realize he is Somebody. Another Zacchean, David Lloyd George, once said that in Wales, where he came from, they measure a man's height from his ears up. That is the way to measure John Neihardt, for he has a fine brow: he has the head of a thinker. After that first square look at him, you never lose the impression that he is an intellectual; but as you talk with him you perceive that he is also the man of action, of virility. And when you begin to realize the degree to which these two sets of characteristics are developed, you have come under the spell of an unusual personality.

It was an unusual thing Mr. Neihardt did eleven years ago when he gave up writing the only kind of poetry that appears to have much chance of becoming popular in this age of periodicals — the short lyric. He had reached a high and certain place as a lyricist, but he has written no lyrics for eleven years

now. His short stories, too, were bringing him easy returns, with a constant demand from the publishers, but he left off doing short stories and lyrics at the same time. He gave up these literary forms because he had decided he would have no time for them if he was to fulfill his destiny. Destiny is not too strong a word; Mr. Neihardt's sense of his purpose in the world was so strong that he decided with perfect definiteness to devote his life to one object — the writing of an epic cycle founded on the early pioneering of the west. He has given himself over to his purpose with the simple directness of religious devotion. He has made no heroics about his sacrifice of the ways that seemed to lie smooth and easy before him. It is true that he had worked very hard for the success he had won, that he had no resources to carry his growing family over the lean years, and that the eventual rewards in the new *métier* were problematical. These facts, however, weighed little with him; he had seen the vision, or heard the voice, or received whatever message is communicated to the soul of a devotee.

This, probably, is too hifalutin. Mr. Neihardt himself expresses it more simply: "Twenty-eight years ago", he wrote in December, 1920, "I began to write verse. I had the epic cycle of the west in mind for some years before I felt that I had developed sufficiently to undertake the task. Seven years ago I felt that I had at last completed my apprenticeship and might well begin the work with which I hope to justify the use of what society has unconsciously given me. My scheme is a large one and will require the best of me for at least fifteen years more. I will be getting a bit old when the task is finished. What shall I 'get out of it', to use the current phrase in its usual sordid sense? Hard work, days and