

even the most hardened practitioners in that mental exercise.

There is for example this novel, "The Fools." It happened to be the first of this present batch that I tackled. In vain I brought all my native powers of application, concentration and inexhaustible patience to bear on this book. That it is a clever book was instantly obvious to me. Alas, it is more than clever: it is consciously clever. To adopt the well-worn, convenient phrase, it bristles with epigram. On the very first page these words occur: "In spite of his epigrams . . ." That is my case. This book is quite readable, once you have taken the first few hurdles and got into your stride, in spite of everybody's epigrams. It is a story of an egotist who tries to reduce all things, the world, the flesh and the devil, to one common factor. Incidentally we are introduced to a coterie of amusing if slightly unreal people who begin and end, as the story itself does, on a note of interrogation. Emphatically *not* a book for the skipper, but one that must be read at leisure and in solitude if its undoubted merits are to be justly appreciated.

In direct contrast to a book of that type, but none the less unskippable, though for a different reason, is "Show Boat." And here I pause to consider in what terms of eulogy I can best describe this altogether enchanting volume. Perhaps the best way to begin is to say at once that it absorbed me throughout its four hundred pages, and that until I had finished it I was its author's abject slave. It compasses the whole gamut of human emotion. There is tragedy in it, and farce, and beauty and force and fire. No more lifelike puppets have crossed my critical purview than these resplendent creatures of a most vivid and yet restrained imagination. One loves them all, from, the old termagant, Parthy Ann Hawks, to that fond waster and endearing rascal, Gaylord Ravenal. And these are only two of a most delightful company. Impossible to select from among them any one specimen of the author's consummate art in the depiction of human nature without doing injustice to the rest. The setting will be unfamiliar to most English readers, the customs and usages of the world it projects and the people who inhabit that world, no less unfamiliar. And yet we recognise them all as familiar old friends in new guise and take them to our hearts unquestioningly as people we have known all our lives. This is to achieve greatness. And this the author has achieved, not by dint of any conscious cleverness but by virtue of a divine wisdom of the heart which is far greater than any mere wisdom of the head. That this book should be a popular success is not, for once, surprising. It is a success from every and any point of view and could not in its very essence fail to appeal alike to the most simple and most sophisticated of readers.

The last two books on my list are both concerned too exclusively with this for ever old and new botheration of sex. But here I would not be misunderstood. "The Panther" only just misses being a triumph in this (to me) rather distasteful vein of fiction. Accepting that limited conception of love which does so terribly engross our younger writers' attention, I am bound to confess that Mr. Gerald Bullett is justified of his exploit. He does at least treat us fairly in not attempting to gloss with any sticky veneer of sentimentality what seems to him the truth about men and women as just vessels of passion. Where he fails is in assuming that the majority of men and women are like that, though possibly in the idle, over-nourished, under-bred set he depicts these carnal lusts of the flesh are the one supreme preoccupation of otherwise empty bodies. Still, given, as I say, this working hypothesis, his story is credible and his characters sufficiently well drawn to pass muster as human beings only a little higher in the order of creation than the beasts that perish. All the same, I feel sure that Mr. Bullett is going to do a great deal better than this. He has all the attributes that go to the making of a fine novelist, once he has shed his affectations, save only experience and a wider vision.

Of "Lenore Divine" it will do to say that it would be

a much better book if it gave us more New Zealand and less psychology. As it is, we have too many English authors already writing this morbid stuff to feel in urgent need of any imported goods of the same description, especially damaged goods. Of race antagonisms and *rapprochements*, of politics, civil and domestic, of industrial problems, and of many similar matters, our author gives us not nearly enough. And the pity of it is that in the concluding chapters her psychology goes all to pieces. We don't believe in this easy swift solution of the difficulties in which she has involved her story. If it had been a simpler story, if it had served merely as a peg on which to hang a richer and fuller presentment of a new world and a new race evolving out of that world, we should have been better satisfied. Notwithstanding these faults, however, and we have only pointed them out because we recognise that this is after all a book which stands out boldly from the ruck of average novels, we warmly welcome "Lenore Divine" as a real asset to what is new, as distinct from what is modern, in English fiction.

In any case, none of these books is to be skipped.

EDWIN PUGH.

MAN AND THE SEA.*

The Bretons have a folk-tale which tells of a fisherman who fell in love with a siren. The siren led him to a secret rock by the seashore and there pressed upon him a magic draught which would cause him to follow her for ever. The fisherman put the draught to his lips and was about to drink it when he remembered the sweetheart he had left behind in his native village; he dashed the potion therefore into the sea; and the precious liquid, melting into the waves, turned them into the salt waters we know to-day.

Mr. Tomlinson I fancy would appreciate the inwardness of that folk-tale, for he too is a victim of the siren's lure—a victim constantly trying to explain to himself the nature and reason of his bondage. The bondage indeed he denies, and waxes politely sarcastic at the expense of those who refuse to deny theirs also; yet at every turn his chains rattle and the impression is gained that he would not if he could be free from the bondage and the siren, from the shadow and the romance, from the fascination and the terror of it all. For in freedom he would lose his own soul.

Like a good friend sitting on the opposite side of the fire, a close friend lingering over a final glass in a cosy smoke-room, Mr. Tomlinson is an incorrigible questioner where the sea is concerned. Occasionally his questions are mere rhetorical pegs upon which to hang a story or a reminiscence; sometimes they are posed in order to draw a confession of faith from his listener; usually they are addressed to himself and intended to crystallise in his own mind something which still refuses to be crystallised. If he asks why, it is not always for you to answer, for it is not you that he is asking; indeed if you rashly interrupt you may well lose a pearl for your pains. But at other times he becomes alive and alert, and then it is up to you to pop your answer almost before the words of his question are across his lips. For Mr. Tomlinson will not wait for you.

That is one reason why he is so stimulating a writer—that he invariably claims your attention. And not merely by his questions—his reminiscences are always pointed, illuminating, beautifully told. His comments upon men, books, events and the things about him are of the shrewdest in their insight and human sympathy—only fools he cannot suffer. It is life and reality he craves, even when they are unpleasant or when they shock our refinement and self-esteem. And we are a nation of romanticists and humbugs. We shout and boast of our ocean cradle in countless popular songs and pretentious poems; we have sold our heritage of the sea for a mess of paving stones and reinforced concrete; our love of ships is confined to the smoke-room of the liner and the cockneyfied-spaces of the

* "Gifts of Fortune." By H. M. Tomlinson. 8s. 6d. (Heinemann.)



From a drawing by H. M. G. Wilson.

E. V. LUCAS.

excursion steamer. But nevertheless Britannia rules the waves. The sea is ours no longer; ours, declares Mr. Tomlinson, it never has been.

For the sea has no human attributes whatever—"There is more pertaining to man in a kitchen midden than in the sea when it most attracts us. Man, fronting the sea, the sea which is inexplicably both hostile and friendly to him because it knows nothing of his existence and his noble aims, is saddened, and is driven to meet its impersonal indifference with fine phrases, that his sense of his worth and his dignity may be rehabilitated. He knows it is absurd to pretend to any love for the sea."

And yet Mr. Tomlinson continues; the number of his volumes increases welcomingly; still he asks his unanswered questions. He follows the siren in an everlasting and unrequited pursuit. But the tragedy of Mr. Tomlinson is that his sweetheart upon the land has turned bitter against him so that in neither element can he hope for ease and peace from that brooding unquiet which has settled upon his mind.

W. BRANCH JOHNSON.

TWO POLES.*

Two Poles—and as far asunder as North and South! I once mentioned Sienkiewicz to Conrad, but found that he was not interested—at least not on that day. Perhaps he could not be interested at any time in a writer whose method was so unlike his own. Sienkiewicz was as "objective" as Walter Scott or Dumas. His great trilogy is a prose epic of Polish history, and his chief purpose, therefore, was to tell the story as well as he could. Conrad's method was not epic. To him, as Mr. Mégroz reminds us in his excellent study, the meaning of a story was not inside the facts, like the kernel in a nut, but outside, like an enveloping mist made visible by the glow from within. The image is confused, but it is Conrad's own. Thus, says Mr. Mégroz, Conrad is a romantic artist whose work has a content of realism. This is an excellent summary, typical of the penetrating essay from which it is quoted. Now that Conrad is being turned by enthusiasts into a grotesquely exaggerated figure, a study like the present, which has firm hold on facts as well as a clear insight into significance, is specially valuable.

Of the tens of thousands who know "Quo Vadis?" as a film, perhaps a hundred or so know the name of the author. I know "Quo Vadis?" as a book and as an opera, but not as a film. Fortunately I read the author's other stories first. Not that "Quo Vadis?" is bad—far from that; but its theme is always suggestive of Wilson Barrett and "The Sign of the Cross." Even Mr. Shaw stumbled badly when he ventured among the lions of martyrdom.

Those readers who want some real thrills should turn to the immense trilogy of historical novels, "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge" and "Pan Michael"—I give the names of the English (or rather American) translation. Miss Gardner calls the last "The Little Knight." Its hero is Michael Volodyovsky, the diminutive swordsman, who reached the apex of fame when an English racehorse was named from him. Miss Gardner uses the aboriginal Polish names, and this hero therefore appears correctly but repellently as Wolodyjowski. There is something to be said for transliteration. Vishnyevetski is more comfortable than Wisniowiecki; and few Englishmen will take to their hearts a hero named Kmicic. I knew him more easily as Kmita.

The "trilogy" deals with events from 1648 to 1673, when Cossack, Russian, Turkish and Tartar hordes swept over the great Polish commonwealth, more than a century before Freedom uttered her celebrated shriek. No details of slaughter, torture and bloody revenge are spared. The story proper gives us the Three Musketeers of Poland, the

* "A Talk with Joseph Conrad." By R. L. Mégroz. 7s. 6d. net. (Elkin Mathews.)—"The Patriot Novelist of Poland: Henryk Sienkiewicz." By Monica M. Gardner. 10s. 6d. net. (Dent.)

diminutive Volodyovsky, the gigantic Podbipienta, and the fat Zagloba, true descendant of Falstaff. They are eminently worth knowing. The best way of approaching this huge and fascinating prose epic is through Miss Gardner's excellent monograph, with its abundance of directly translated quotations. You will then feel at home with the complicated history and geography of the story. These novels are old favourites of mine, and I recommend them to those who like tales of the clash of nations, with half Europe for the stage.

Sienkiewicz wrote many other stories, long and short, and was a patriot of the best type. Long ago he prophesied that Christian Europe would have to extinguish the dominion of the Prussian Huns. He died in 1916, before the fulfilment was accomplished. His work and life deserved a good historian, and have found one in Miss Gardner.

GEORGE SAMPSON.

A SCOTTISH PARISH.*

The parish of Forteviot, in Perthshire, is one of the smallest in Scotland. Dr. Meldrum, a former minister, has compiled its annals in a manner which is uncommonly attractive and acceptable, because everything that can be told has been told with conspicuous ability and care. Forteviot dates back to Pictish times, and was indeed the ancient Pictish capital, though there are few relics now to connect it with that distant and elusive past. The church naturally takes precedence (there are more churches than one), and of Forteviot Kirk its long line of pre-Reformation and post-Reformation clergy has been faithfully chronicled to the present day. None of these figure with special prominence ecclesiastically or in any other way, but all of them achieved honourable service, and because of that they deserve to be remembered with the pride which every good Scot still attaches to the first institution in his land. Of the lairds of Forteviot, Dr. Meldrum has much to tell, genealogical and otherwise. Lord Robertson of Forteviot is mentioned as perhaps the parish's most illustrious son. It possesses romantic and poetic associations, not least that of Williamina Belsches—Sir Walter Scott's first love—of whose family record the author presents some fresh details, correcting errors in Lockhart and others, and showing that possibly at what is yet called "Scott's Bridge" the final parting of the pair took place. This finely produced and well illustrated volume is another argument for the literary and historical interest which a Scottish minister ought to have in his parish, and it is also evidence of his opportunity to make of it something more than a mere habitation and a name.

W. S. CROCKETT.

MR. WALPOLE'S FINEST NOVEL.†

Before his latest book came my way I was by no means prejudiced in favour of Mr. Hugh Walpole's novels. As a matter of fact I had only read two, "Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill" and "Maradick at Forty." The one I thought original but crude and melodramatic; the other, to my mind, might have been written by any fairly competent purveyor of second-rate fiction. "Harmer John" is miles ahead of these two tales. It is the story of the irruption into an old English cathedral city, a city just normally self-complacent and corrupt, of a young Swedish gymnastic instructor, who at first charms everyone save a greedy lawyer and a sensual slum-landlord, gets engaged to a beautiful but un-ideal lower middle-class girl, contracts friendships of varying degrees of intimacy and stability with three different types of clergymen and, having exchanged his mission of developer of bodies for that of builder of beautiful souls and beautiful streets, antagonises

* "Forteviot: The History of a Strathearn Parish." By Neil Meldrum, B.D., Ph.D. 7s. 6d. (Paisley: Gardner.)

† "Harmer John." By Hugh Walpole. 7s. 6d. (Macmillan.)