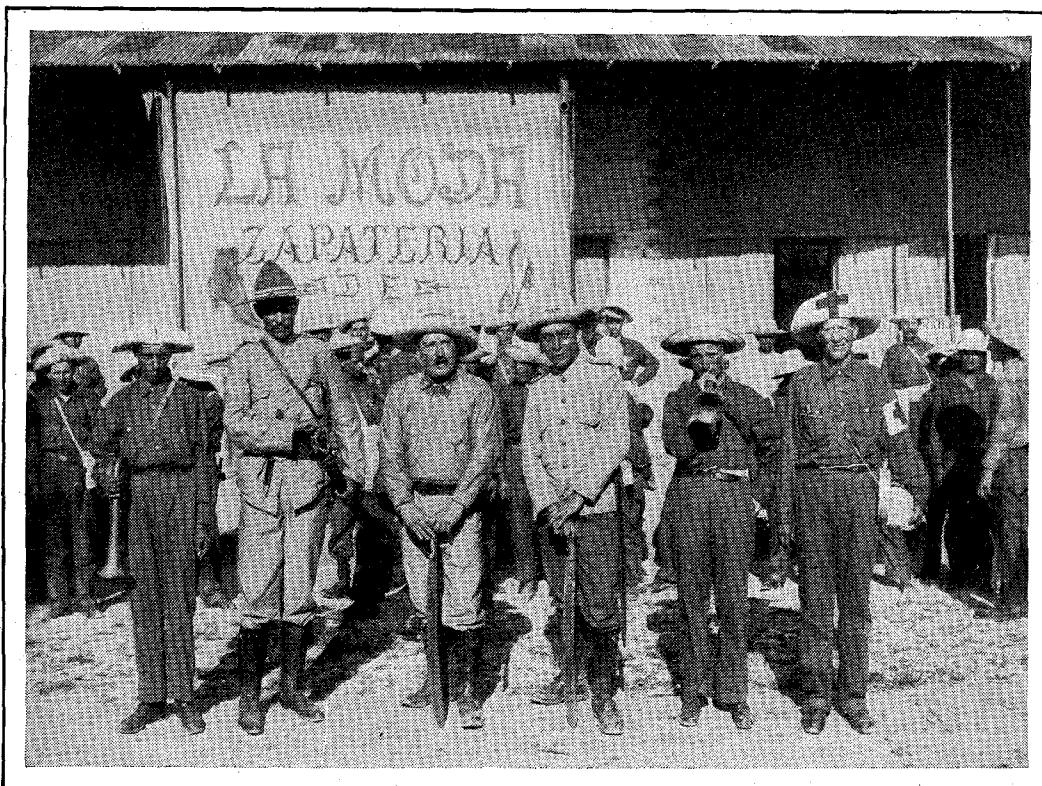


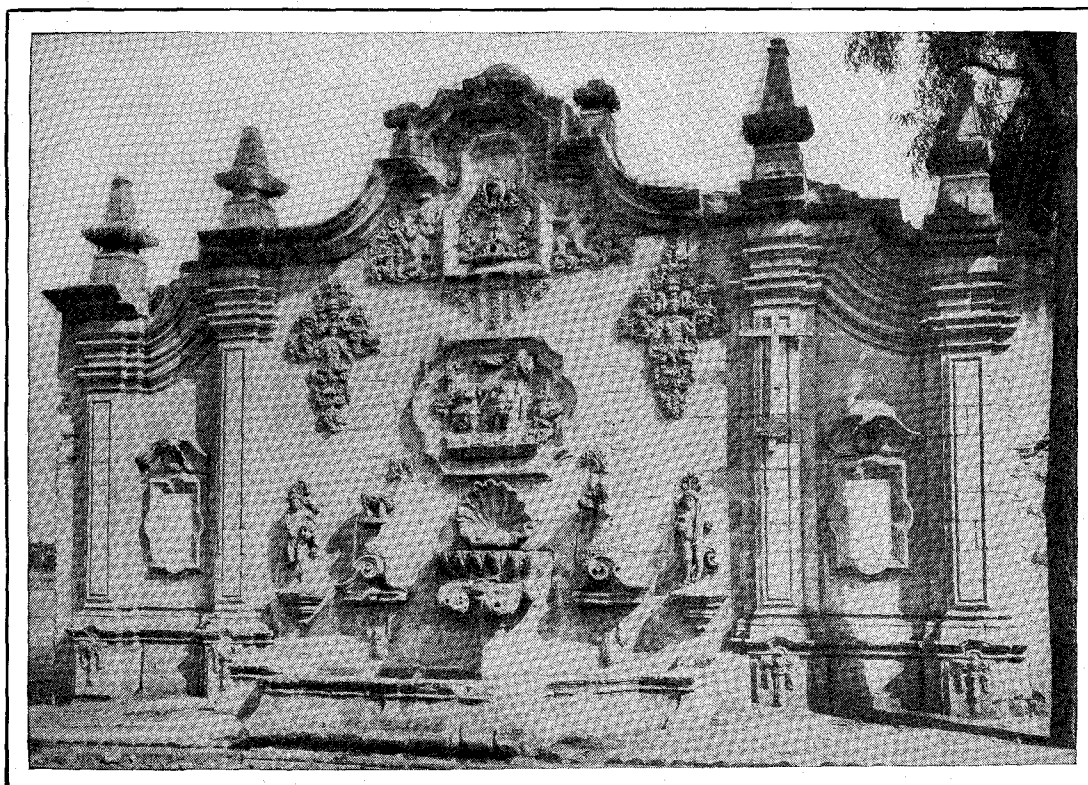
# COSTA RICA OF TO-DAY—MEXICO OF YESTERDAY



From John G. Rumney, Detroit, Michigan

## A GROUP OF COSTA RICA STAFF OFFICERS

This picture shows a military formation of staff officers in front of a Costa Rican shoe store, which is interesting because of the variety of uniform and the unsimilarity of the officers' carriage and demeanor as compared with those of our own staff officers. Mr. Rumney, we are told, took the photograph immediately after the cessation of hostilities during the recent troubles in Costa Rica.



From H. E. Bailey, Phoenix, Arizona

## ORNAMENTAL FOUNTAIN OF OLD MEXICAN VIADUCT BUILT BY CORTEZ

This fountain, our informant states, is one of the best preserved sections of a viaduct built by Cortez to carry water to the City of Mexico. It is situated near the "White House of Mexico," Chapultepec Castle.



# THE BOOK TABLE

## GROWTH OF THE SOIL<sup>1</sup>

**K**NUT HAMSDUN received the Nobel Prize for Literature, not specifically for "Growth of the Soil," but for the culmination in this his masterpiece of a long record of painstaking, conscientious devotion to the art of writing.

His sketches, plays, and novels, if one may judge from the comments of critics, did not try to be popular; they paid little attention to construction or unity or story interest. They were like the half-finished drawings of heads made by a painter who is gathering material and ideas for the picture by which he hopes to be remembered. Of one of the early stories Mr. Worster, who furnishes for this work a welcome account of Hamsun's life and activity, says: "It is interspersed with irrelevant fancies, visions, and imaginings, a chain of tied notes heard as an undertone through the action on the surface."

But there is no uncertainty or lack of definiteness about "Growth of the Soil." It goes on its destined course, strong, clear, and single as a shining stream. It stands the test of dealing with material, things—such as the earth, the trees, animals, crops—with solid realism and yet of infusing the picture with the light of imagination. So, too, with the peasants of the distant part of Norway depicted; they grow out of the soil almost as truly as do the trees; they are certainly ignorant and in a sense dull, yet each is a distinct creation; Achilles and Thersites in the Iliad are not more unlike than, for instance, Hamsun's Isak, the primal man of the new grown community (silent, strong, unconquerable by the forces of nature), and the old woman Oline (shifty, dishonest, cringing, revengeful).

It is a feat for an author to hold American readers intent and absorbed in the simple doings of these few country people in a lonely, distant Norwegian hillside. This Hamsun assuredly does. He succeeds because he *shows* us these men, women, and children, he does not merely talk about them; he makes word-paintings of nature instead of raving about its beauty; and in place of theorizing about motive and temperament he tells of deeds and lets the reader infer causes through character.

It is not exact to call this remarkable novel an epic of the land, yet one feels that it has a heroic tone; if it had inclined toward symbolism (which, thanks be, it doesn't), the two protagonists of the combat would be man and the soil—Isak and his farmland. So splendidly does the land yield its abundance to the straining vigor of its conqueror that we find almost a dramatic interest in the growth of human society out of and from the soil.

First comes Isak, a "barge of a

man," the figure of a man in a great solitude, trudging with sack on back over the common lands open to settlement. He seeks here and there, sleeps under a rock on a pine bed, makes his choice, then back and forth with food and tools, "a born carrier of loads, a lumbering barge of a man in the forest, tramping long roads and carrying heavy burdens, as if life without a load on one's shoulders were a miserable thing." Hamsun often repeats the phrases, "barging along," "a barge of a man;" they exactly express Isak.

In time comes a goat, then a hut, then a woman, then Cow—"they laid awake



Wide World Photos

KNUT HAMSDUN

late that night talking about Cow." And in more time came children—and trouble!

Greater and greater became Isak's ambition. He worked as the Trojans fought; house and outbuildings, tools and machinery, cattle, roads for his own use—there was nothing he did not dare attempt. Neighbors appeared, and with them the evils and sins as well as the friendliness of community life. Against the stalwart, persistent Isak are contrasted weaklings and clever people of no set purpose—Geissler the Lensman (assistant Government superintendent) is a gem of portrayal art. Crime and lust come too—the people of such a community are apt to be coarse as well as primitive—and there are bits of faithful description that are a little startling and a pitiful intimation that infanticide is too common a curse in such northern solitary communities.

As all this growth, good and bad, evolves from soil and life becomes more complex and varied, the novel's story-interest increases likewise. That is the

art of the thing; and its apparent unconsciousness yet thoroughly planned purpose would make the book a prize-winner in the literary realm if Nobel had never instituted a prize-winning system.

But always the reader's imagination turns back to Isak—a strong man in a wilderness. We copy a pen-picture of man and place at their prime:

A desert, a dying place? Far from it, all about was swarming with life; two new men, four new hands to work, fields and meadows and homes. Oh, the little green tracts in a forest, a hut and water, children and cattle about. Corn waving on the moorlands where naught but horsetail grew before, bluebells nodding on the fells, and yellow sunlight blazing in the lady's slipper flowers outside a house. And human beings living there, move and talk and think and are there with heaven and earth.

Here stands the first of them all, the first man in the wilds. He came that way, knee-deep in marsh-growth and heather, found a sunny slope and settled there. Others came after him, they trod a path across the waste *Almenning*; others again, and the path became a road; carts drove there now. Isak may be content, may start with a little thrill of pride; he was the founder of a district, the pioneer.

Not alone Norwegian literature but world literature will recognize the fresh and clear note of imagination in this drama of man and nature.

R. D. TOWNSEND.

## THE NEW BOOKS

### FICTION AND DRAMA

**BRIMMING CUP (THE).** By Dorothy Canfield. Harcourt, Brace & Howe, New York.

As between husband and wife should each lead a life of individual freedom of mind and action? Yes, said the two whose marriage begins the novel, but also they should frankly face together whatever situation should arise and honorably discuss it. So when the brilliant and fascinating advocate of modernism and art and romance and poetry comes along he really cannot prevail with such a wife and mother as against the solid, unscintillating husband. And the book ends with the mother's answer to a child's question: "No; I really don't think that father and I are afraid of anything." A book of sound social philosophy and of charming family life.

**FEAST OF LANTERNS (THE).** By Louise J. Miln. The F. A. Stokes Company, New York.

The author's knowledge of the life and culture of Chinese aristocrats makes this novel worth reading for its descriptive side alone. There is tragedy in the position of the Chinese girl of noble lineage, highly educated in England, and possessed of both Eastern and Western culture, who loves and is loved by an Englishman of equally high type. She knows that their marriage would bring social contempt on him in Eng-

<sup>1</sup>Growth of the Soil. By Knut Hamsun. Translated by W. W. Worster. 2 vols. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.