

THE BOOK TABLE

GROWTH OF THE SOIL¹

KNUT 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).

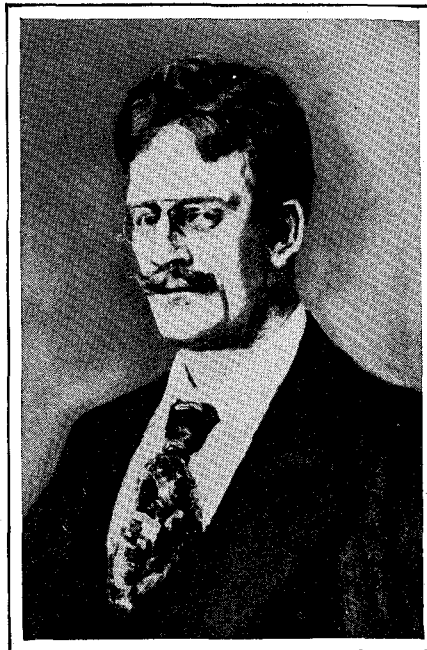
It is a feat for an author to hold American readers intent and absorbed in the simple doings of these few country people in a lonely, distant Norwegian hillside. This Hamsun assuredly does. He succeeds because he *shows* us these men, women, and children, he does not merely talk about them; he makes 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-

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

land and on her in China, and gives up her love to work for China's future.

FIFTY CONTEMPORARY ONE-ACT PLAYS.

By Frank Shay and Pierre Loving. The Stewart & Kidd Company, Cincinnati.

This is a very excellent anthology containing a great variety of dramatic material. The student of contemporary drama and the amateur actor should find it invaluable.

GIRL IN FANCY DRESS (THE). By J. E. Buckrose. The George H. Doran Company, New York.

A cheerful and mirthful romance in which an heiress and a poor country girl exchange parts and an amusing comedy of errors results.

BIOGRAPHY

HOSPITABLE ENGLAND IN THE SEVENTIES. Illustrated. By Richard Henry Dana. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

Richard Henry Dana in 1875-6 visited England, France, Italy, and Egypt, kept a minute diary of his experiences, and in them narrated vividly the customs of the country and the characteristics of his hosts and guests. Son of Richard H. Dana, author of "Two Years Before the Mast," he had, for his father's sake, ready welcome to exclusive circles. A graduate of Harvard, an athlete, a cultured gentleman, and last, but not least, an Episcopalian, characterized by both physical and social courage, able to take an oar at Oxford, to hunt and fish in Scotland, to join in lawn tennis out of doors and in billiards in the house, and free from that self-consciousness which is perhaps the greatest of social handicaps and makes its victims either timid or aggressive and sometimes alternately first one and then the other, he had in himself a pass-key which fitted all doors. His vivid pictures, not painted for the public, which now for the first time the public is permitted to see, interpret graphically phases of social life in old aristocratic England which will not long survive the advent to political power of democratic England. A little more relentless editing would have both shortened and improved the book for the general reader. But it will be not difficult and perhaps more satisfactory for each reader to do his own editing.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY POWERS AND AIMS OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY (THE). By William Milligan Sloane, LL.D. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

There is scarcely a page in this valuable volume which does not offer some pertinent suggestion. The author's aim, we judge, is found in his words: "Democracy is in its essence conservative; the drift toward Socialism is an attack on its very life; the democratic nation is the best form of human association so far devised; neither democracy nor nationality insures enduring peace." And yet Professor Sloane concludes his work with the judgment that peace is the test of our democracy. He shows first how democracy has been developed, what its institutions are, and what its formula and terms. He describes the foes in its household; incidentally he shows that

German "social democracy is misnamed" and that the Social Democratic Party in Germany "has been making its enormous strides, not as a Socialistic or even as a Labor party, but because it is solidly democratic." Elsewhere he says: "Perhaps the worst indictment of democracy as it works to-day is its blundering inefficiency and its intolerable extravagance."

ESSAYS AND CRITICISM

CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE (THE). Edited by William Peterfield Trent, M.A., LL.D., John Erskine, Ph.D., Stuart P. Sherman, Ph.D., Carl Van Doren, Ph.D. 4 vols. **LATER NATIONAL LITERATURE**—Parts II and III. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

These volumes complete this important literary achievement. The "Cambridge History of American Literature" furnishes a history of the literature written in English in the United States from the first settlement to the end of the nineteenth century—in fact, it is so close to date as to contain reference to "The Education of Henry Adams." The editors have secured the services of contributors, American and Canadian, who in all cases write with special knowledge of the topic assigned. The work, as truly stated by the publishers, is exact and authoritative, but, though written by specialists, has been designed to meet the needs of the general reader. The indexes and bibliographies are excellent.

WAR BOOKS

GENERAL STAFF AND ITS PROBLEMS (THE). By General Ludendorff. Translated by F. A. Holt, O.B.E. 2 vols. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

Of all the supposed authors of the World War, the most talked of has doubtless been General Ludendorff. His object in compiling the present volumes is evidently threefold: first, "to bring home to every German that a peace of understanding was unattainable;" second, "to reveal how much was kept secret from the Supreme Command by the Imperial Government;" and, third, "to justify the confidence which the majority of the German people reposed in Field Marshal Hindenburg and myself throughout the war." To this end these volumes consist of original and contemporary documents taken from the records of the German General Staff. They include matters of such importance as that of the conference at which the unrestricted submarine campaign was finally decided upon and as the violent interchange of letters between Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg and General Ludendorff. The author discusses the work of the army in peace times, revealing Germany's strenuous efforts to prepare for war. He tells us about recruiting, labor, financial, and food questions in connection with the army; provision for men returned from the war; and of course about the war itself, its Polish and Russian aspects, the Austrian efforts towards a separate peace, President Wilson's peace attitude, and, most interesting of all, America's entrance into the war. The author frankly concludes that the American Army deprived

Germany of victory "and made possible that of the Entente after the strength of our army had been broken by revolution."

EDUCATIONAL

HOW TO SPEAK FRENCH LIKE THE FRENCH. By Marie and Jeanne Yersin. The J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia.

This is a remarkably complete collection of French idioms. Certainly if one mastered them all one could claim to speak French in the fashion of Paris and not Stratford-atte-Bowe. We suspect that the lady who remarked to a tardy friend, "*Dépêchez-vous! Vous serez gauche derrière,*" was not familiar with this volume.

MISCELLANEOUS

KING'S TREASURES OF LITERATURE (THE). General Editor, Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

We have already referred to this excellent series of clearly printed and neatly bound small volumes. A dozen or more new issues have reached us. They include many recognized masterpieces of literature, and from the entire collection almost any one would find it easy to make a choice of books welcome in his library. Among the present issues, for instance, are Longfellow's "Hiawatha," Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome," an unusually readable collection of papers about "London in Literature," Mrs. Ewing's "Jackanapes," and W. H. Hudson's "Birds in a Village." These few examples indicate the wide range of interest and subjects.

BOOKS RECEIVED

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

BRADFORD'S HISTORY OF THE PLYMOUTH SETTLEMENT. 1608-1650. Rendered into Modern English by Harold Paget. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED STATES. By Isaac Lippincott, Ph.D. D. Appleton & Co., New York.

STATES OF SOUTH AMERICA (THE). By Charles Domville-Fife. Illustrated. The Macmillan Company, New York.

WORKERS AT WAR (THE). By Frank Julian Warne. (The Century New World Series.) The Century Company, New York.

POETRY

LAST KNIGHT (THE), AND OTHER POEMS. By Theodore Maynard. The Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York.

SONGS OF THE TRAIL. By Henry Herbert Knibbs. Illustrated. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

INVALID EUROPE. Some Impressions of Recent Travel. By Alfred F. Seligsberg. Boni & Liveright, New York.

WAR BOOKS

VICTORY AT SEA (THE). By Rear-Admiral William Sowden Sims, U. S. N., in Collaboration with Burton J. Hendrick. Doubleday, Page & Co., Garden City.

WHAT HAPPENED AT JUTLAND. The Tactics of the Battle. By C. C. Gill. 26 Diagrams. The George H. Doran Company, New York.

SPORT AND ATHLETICS

ART OF LAWN TENNIS (THE). By William T. Tilden 2d. Illustrated. The George H. Doran Company, New York.

CAMPING AND WOODCRAFT. By Horace Kephart. The Macmillan Company, New York.