

# THE BOOK TABLE

## AN EPIC OF THE NORTH SEAS

BY ROBERT D. TOWNSEND

THE hard life of the fishermen of the high seas has often been depicted in fiction. Pierre Loti writes of it in a romantic, exotic way, as his race and temperament direct. Johan Bojer, on the contrary, is a Scandinavian, impelled by the idea that the ancient courage and endurance of the Vikings has come down into the life of the Norwegian fishermen of to-day. His "Last of the Vikings"<sup>1</sup> follows the obsession of Myran, the fisher captain, who will go out to fight his enemies—the storms, the rocks, and the waves—though he might well and easily leave the sea for the farm. His son and his mates are his battle companions. The life they lead is exactly described by one writer as one of "almost unimaginable rigor and hardship, bravely borne and described with the utmost simplicity."

To be simple and yet to strike home with human directness and with seemingly unconscious dramatic power is given to few romanticists. Rightly, I think, this epic of sea conflict and its background of the tragedy and tenseness of the home life of the sea fighters make it a literary sea piece that may well be bracketed with Hamsun's epic of the farm lands, "The Growth of the Soil," as marking the high tide of Scandinavian literature in our day. The translation is excellent

in that it keeps the spirit of the author without pandering to literalism.

We are told that Bojer is read and known in England as well as on the Continent, and that several of his books have been widely translated. "The Last of the Vikings" is, I believe, the first of his stories to be published in English in this country. It definitely proves him to be a master in his own field—and that field is not solely the sea and its power to draw to it human heroism and to evolve men of daring and infinite strength to endure. No; his effort succeeds in using insight to depict character; or, as the English critic William Archer says, "The greatness of the book lies in its profound humanity."

It ought to be added that in common with most Scandinavian fiction this story is not particularly cheerful, although there are bright glints of humor and of the charm of love penetrating the gloom of storm and stress. Neither will it be always pleasing to delicate-minded readers, who might perhaps prefer to have rough and tough sea-fighting fishermen talk like yachtsmen at a regatta ball. We see the fisher people here as they are, and may be all the better for the tang of coarse manners and speech that marks these "toilers of the sea."

A sound piece of writing and an obviously true seascape drawn from nature is this powerful romance of the Lofoten Islands.

<sup>1</sup> The Last of the Vikings. By Johan Bojer. Illustrated. The Century Company, New York. \$2.

## PROTESTANT FRIENDS OF A CATHOLIC COUNTRY

BY GINO SPERANZA

ON a certain occasion during the World War it happened that Dr. John Nollen, the Director of the Y. M. C. A. work in Italy, found himself on the same train with our then Secretary of War, who was going to visit the Italian front. Secretary Baker, wishing to know about the Y work, asked one of his staff, a colonel, to go and tell Dr. Nollen that the Secretary of War wished to speak to him. The colonel found the Director surrounded by Italian officers, who wanted to know exactly what Dr. Nollen's rank was and who could not believe that he had no military "handle" to his name. The Y Director, who, despite his being an Iowa Dutchman and a college president, is a good deal of a wit, on receiving the summons, said in Italian to his eager questioners: "Gentlemen, if the Secretary of War picks out a

colonel to come and ask me to see him, you can easily work out my exact hierarchical position in this train-load of army officers!"

I cite this little story to show the simple and easy friendliness which existed between the Italian soldiers and the American Y workers in that much-tried land during the great conflict. It is this fine, simple, human relationship which Professor Wannamaker's new book on the Y. M. C. A. on the Italian front vividly presents to us.<sup>1</sup>

If I were to sum up in a few words the outstanding character of that American organization at the Italian front during the war, I should say it

<sup>1</sup> With Italy in Her Final War of Liberation: A Story of the "Y" on the Italian Front. By Olin D. Wannamaker. With an Introduction by Allan Chester Johnson. Illustrated. The Fleming H. Revell Company, New York. \$1.75.

was its most natural and unassuming spirit of friendliness. Its officers had neither rank nor titles—no, not even spurs, as some other near-military civil officials from America loved to wear down the Corso in Rome! And there was no attempt at "evangelization" by these workers, no second thought, no secret hope of getting a foothold in Catholic Italy; only the simple and constant labor of trying to make the life of the Italian *fantoccine* a little easier, a little more comfortable, and a little brighter.

The basis of the success of this unassuming but most helpful undertaking was a profound understanding in the Y workers—and notably in Dr. Nollen and his personal staff—of the psychology and of the spirit which animated the Italian people in the Great War. It was this understanding which made possible a co-operation between Americans and Italians of so intimate and fine a character as, I think, has been rarely equaled in the record of civilian international "spiritual alliances." So that Professor Wannamaker can justly say: "A few hundreds of Americans in the uniform of the 'Y' moved freely among Italians under conditions so unusual that conflicting elements in the two national types were almost wholly subordinated to elements which harmonized and co-operated. For whatever success the 'Y' may have attained in endeavoring to play its part in the last year of the great struggle between Italy and Austria, a very large portion of the credit belongs to the Italian officers who facilitated its undertakings, other influential Italians who co-operated generously, faithful Italian employees, and the soldiers detailed to the Fratellanza (Y. M. C. A. Brotherhood) service."

It is unfortunate that the author should have included in this plain story of international co-operation of the finest sort an over-detailed and cumbersome list of "acknowledgments" of all and sundry who contributed to the success of the work. The undertaking was big enough and fine enough to make all who contributed to its success satisfied with anonymity. The insertion in the very heart of the book of all these personal data detracts especially from what is otherwise a splendid synthetic picture of Italy at war.

It seems to me that the Second Chapter—"The Home Front"—lights up one phase of Italian life and activity in the war as no other publication, pamphlet, or report in English has done, and the First and Ninth Chapters, dealing more specifically with military topics, are distinct

contributions to the study of Italy's military participation in the World War.

There is so much that is new and

so much that is freshly told in these pages that the book is vivid and readable even so many years after the conflict was closed.

## THE NEW BOOKS

### FICTION

**ACCORDING TO GIBSON.** By Denis Mackail. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$2.

Gibson is an accomplished and stupendous liar, and his strange adventures are told with the utmost apparent seriousness to a man who hardly knows him whenever the two meet in their club. There are any number of surprises and temptations to hearty laughter in these stories, which are unique in their pretense of sober reality.

**LUNATIC AT LARGE AGAIN (THE).** By J. Storer Clouston. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.

The readers of this story and its predecessor will be only too willing that this particular lunatic should escape again and again. He is as clever as he is irresponsible, and the way in which he baffles pursuers, outwits deep-plotting villains, and makes the route of true love smooth is a marvel of high spirits.

**OVER THE FOOTLIGHTS.** By Stephen Leacock. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$1.50.

Parodies on plays have been not uncommon; but these "dramas" by Mr. Leacock do not burlesque individual plays or authors, but hold up for amusement types of play-writing, such as the old-fashioned melodrama, the "piffle play," the movie film of the Wild West, and, best of all to our liking, the classical play as presented in the original Greek by college students. Here is a brief excerpt from the typical English translation kindly furnished by the college authorities of "Oroastus," by Diplodocus:

*Chorus.* Oh, how unhappy is this now-standing-before-us King!

*Herald.* Your palace, O King, has on the one hand been destroyed by fire and your crown, which in and of itself for the most part signified your kingship, has on the other hand been stolen.

**THRIFTY STOCK, AND OTHER STORIES.** By Ben Ames Williams. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.00.

Mr. Williams made an enviable reputation as a writer of sea stories with the virility of Jack London and some qualities that were not native to that writer. In this volume Mr. Williams shows quite successfully that he can deal with a different class of fiction subjects. One considerable group of the stories tells of the people of a village called Fraternity—a real village, the author tells us, certainly one that furnishes extremely pleasing local color and material for character depiction.

### BIOGRAPHY

**MIND THAT FOUND ITSELF (A).** By Clifford Whittingham Beers. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. \$2.

One may take this book up with a certain aloofness, scenting a study in

morbid psychology; but as the reader goes on, the story becomes of absorbing interest and he is not content to stop until he has arrived at the last page. The book has been compared in its interest to a novel; but it has, what is perhaps uncommon in present-day novels, a "happy ending" that has proved itself of great value to the mentally afflicted. In all our personal reading we do not remember a more striking exemplification of the Pauline aphorism, "No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness," than Mr. Beers's account of his misfortune and the great gain to human welfare that has resulted from it.

### POETRY

**CHILD'S DAY (A).** By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Winifred Bromhall. Henry Holt & Co., New York. \$1.75.

Has there been—since Stevenson—a children's poet so aptly and genuinely endowed for the rôle as Walter de la Mare? Another name does not come readily to mind. "A Child's Day," published first in England in 1912, and now brought out in a new edition here, reveals again Mr. de la Mare's ability to do that most difficult of all feats of juvenile literature—to write of the child's world from within the child's mind. The look worn by these verses is not that of a supercilious adult condescension, but the sober or smiling expression of childhood's own reaction to the world about it. The same qualities of wide-eyed wonder and simple joy and shuddering awe which are in the author's "Peacock Pie" are in evidence here. One finds cause for regret in only a rare and occasional awkwardness of versification. The verses are in the form of a chronicle of a child's day—from waking and tub, to supper and bed. The various stages are touched with a spirited imaginativeness that could scarcely fail to capture the interest of children to whom they may be read. The poetry is simple without being silly, and delicate without being thin.

**PETERBOROUGH ANTHOLOGY (THE).** Compiled and with an Introduction by Jean Wright Gorman and Herbert S. Gorman. The Theatre Arts, Inc., New York. \$2.

The expressed purpose of this volume is to show the kind of poet who goes to the MacDowell Colony, at Peterborough, New Hampshire. The result is, on the whole, impressive. The list of contributors includes a surprisingly large number of names distinguished in American poetry, and the high level of performance suffers only occasionally in the 202 pages.

The Introduction by the compilers

offers a serviceable exposition of the character and purpose of the MacDowell Colony as a sane and serious workshop for artists with something to do. It is in no sense a Greenwich Village artist colony, flowing with ties and hair and theories, but a retreat where the serious worker in any of the seven arts may retire for a period from the distractions of the world and under the most favorable conditions translate his powers and impulses into the fullness of achievement. The Colony represents the realization of a dream harbored by the late Edward MacDowell, the composer, and developed through the practical genius of Mrs. MacDowell.

The collection of poets here offered represents divergent tendencies in the art, and brings together such widely different performances as those of E. A. Robinson, Maxwell Bodenheim, Padraic Colum, and Lola Ridge. Some hint of the variety of the poetry, as well as of the distinction of the contributors, may be had when to the names already given are added those of Hermann Hagedorn, Josephine Preston Peabody, Eunice Tietjens, and Elinor Wylie.

The quality of the poetry is such as might be expected where such contributors predominate. In some instances one encounters work that would not be found in this superior company except for the common Peterborough association; but the impression from a reading of the book through is of much excellent and various poetry.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

### FICTION

**HIDDEN LIVES.** By Leonora Eyles. Boni & Liveright, New York. \$2.

**WHATEVER GODS.** By Maurice Samuel. Duffield & Co., New York. \$2.

### MUSIC, PAINTING, AND OTHER ARTS

**ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA (THE).** By Frederick H. Martens. D. Appleton & Co., New York. \$3.

### BIOGRAPHY

**CHIEF MINISTERS OF ENGLAND (THE).** By Hon. Clive Bigham. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$8.

### HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

**AMBITION.** By Leonie Aminoff. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$2.

### TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

**SAILOR TOWN DAYS.** By C. Fox Smith. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$2.

**TRIFLES AND TRAVELS.** By Arthur Keyser. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$4.

### RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

**REACTIONISM.** By John D. Boyle. G. P. Putnam Sons, New York. \$2.

### SCIENCE

**LIFE OF THE SCORPION (THE).** By J. Henri Fabre. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$2.50.

### MISCELLANEOUS

**EDITORIALS OF HENRY WATTERSON (THE).** By Arthur Krock. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$3.50.

**TRAINING FOR POWER AND LEADERSHIP.** By Grenville Kleiser. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$3.