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GOOD BOOKS

Foreign Literature

Hamsun Views Life

LANDSTRYKERE (Vagabonds). By **KNUT HAMSDUN**. Oslo: Gyldendal. 1927.
 Reviewed by **JULIUS MORITZEN**

FROM being himself a good deal of a wanderer, making the roving life conspicuous as an element in some of his most popular books, Knut Hamsun, after the lapse of four years presents his cosmopolitan audience with another big novel, in which, however, the rolling stone symbol is employed to show that a *wanderlust* existence is anything but a virtue or a payer of dividends.

It is true, of course, that in "Growth of the Soil," the love of the Norwegian for his native acres is strongly emphasized. But in "Vagabonds" Hamsun carries his idea along different channels and furnishes a picture of real joy in cultivating the home land. In fact, he tells the young people of Norway that the best they can do for themselves and others is to stay at home and help build up the country.

Now, in view of the fact that the United States has become more or less of a closed book to Europeans, because of the quota regulations, there is a slight suspicion in the mind of anyone reading this latest offering of his carefully that since the American Eldorado is no more, Norway is good enough for the Norwegians. Be this as it may, Hamsun puts into the mouth of one of his leading characters, Joakim, that "It is, then, that we should cultivate our own soil, Norway's soil; then we won't have to buy so much of our food elsewhere and will escape heavy taxes and other burdens."

It is August, a typical Hamsun character, who is the pivotal figure of the book, and with him we make the acquaintance of his

friend, Edevart Andreassen. But, as always, Knut Hamsun presents a human gallery of almost illimitable dimensions. And those who have followed this Norwegian writer through his various productions are sure to recognize here and there Johan Nagel, Lieutenant Glahn, and other striking personalities that go to make the Hamsun novels unique.

The remarkable hold of Knut Hamsun on readers in all parts of the world must be due to certain qualities such as have made Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen literary favorites. In "Vagabonds" the *motif* is as simple as in a story by the Danish writer of fairy tales. Every word is poetic, although rugged when needed. Whether Hamsun pictures fishermen, peasants, traders in this small-town Norway and countryside, he endows all with the one thing essential to make a book of lasting worth, namely, reality. There is this difference between Hamsun and his great predecessor, Ibsen, that where the latter made the small community the scene for his world-message, to Hamsun it is just what it is, and nothing more.

Since Hamsun settled down as proprietor of a considerable estate no doubt the satisfaction of possession, unconsciously perhaps, is creeping into his later productions. But in contrast with many other writers who have tasted cosmopolitan fame and believe it necessary to turn their talents toward what they consider the demands of a foreign reading public, Hamsun does not deviate where it comes to *locale* or personnel. He sticks to the environment he knows best, and of which he considers himself a part. For this reason we meet with the same people, the same regions, the same problems, albeit made amenable to the particular purpose he

The Wits' Weekly

Owing to delays in receipt of the mail forwarded to Mr. Davison in the South where he is now lecturing, the announcement of the award for the competition falling due this week has been postponed. After Mr. Davison had made his decision as to the prize winner thirty entries were received which could not have been considered in advance of *The Saturday Review* going to press.

has in mind. In this he takes, perhaps, the same position as does his famous colleague, Johan Bojer. "Our Own Stock" and "Vagabonds" have much in common.

The book, as has already been intimated, is primarily concerned with the question of emigration, and the driving force that makes the youth of Norway, as elsewhere in Europe, seek foreign fields in which to settle down. There has been a movement afoot in Norway for some time for a better utilization of the natural resources of the soil. If Knut Hamsun had been commissioned by his Government publicly to take the stand for his people remaining at home, he could have done nothing more effective than writing "Vagabonds." It is a new Hamsun that we here have to deal with but a Hamsun as skilful as ever in the delineation of plot and characters.

A Notable Autobiography

DER JUNGE TOBIAS. By **KARL SCHEFFLER**. Leipzig: Insel Verlag. 1927.

HERR KARL SCHEFFLER is one of the most widely-read of German art-historians and critics. His volumes on German and European art in the nineteenth century are authoritative works in their category, and his essays on other artistic subjects are sold in many thousands of copies. The present volume is obviously an autobiography. It reveals a singularly interesting career, but does not derive all its value from this fact. Besides being a very well-told account of his own life, it illuminates a certain side of German social development in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century.

The title, "Young Tobit," is a little puzzling at first. Later we learn that the hero, Johann, is considered to have been guarded by the angels of intelligence and hope, just as the Biblical character was surrounded by heavenly protectors. Let it be said at once, however, that this is no smug story of "self-help;" the absolute frankness of the style takes away any hint of self-complacency. Johann was the son of a respectable painter and decorator. He was born in a small North German town, near a large seaport, and his beginnings fell at the time when industrialism was casting its shadow over the lives of the German lower middle class. The rush to the big city was beginning; it was no longer considered as respectable to be a manual worker, however skilled, as a clerk in a shipping firm. The first chapters, in fact, are a kind of "Deserted Village" in prose. Johann's father apprenticed his son to his own trade and the minute technical account of the business of painting and decorating, which is never tiring, bears the stamp of absolute first-hand experience. There are pages which remind us of Crabbe, so well is technical knowledge, realistically conveyed, merged into art. Or again, we can recall parallels with the experience which Dickens put into his novels.

But the boy had ideas, not of "improving himself"—that snobbish note is absent—but of something more nearly fulfilling his inner nature. He wanted to write; he wanted to paint pictures. A certain shyness kept him aloof from the coarser enjoyment of his fellow-workers, and eventually his father allowed him to go to the city and take regular art-lessons. Here temptations pressed upon him. He was exploited by friends who fell too easily victims to the vices of the town. There is a whole chapter entitled "Prostitution" which fits well into the complete story. It is an exact rendering of the physical chaos of the big city, just as the last chapter is a rendering of the intellectual chaos. For this latter the writer holds responsible the vulgarization of the Darwinian theory, which seems to have made a far deeper impression on average minds in Germany than anywhere else. The last chapter might be called "The Making of an Idealist Art Critic;" it shows how the young man fought his way through to clarity and self-confidence. It must have been no easy task to make this plain life-story of such gripping interest.

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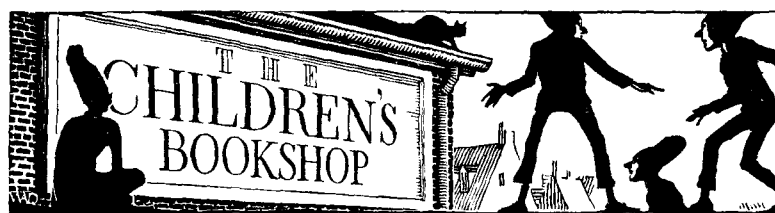
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A Child, Forsooth

IF only children were definitely one thing or another it would be a comparatively simple matter to make books for them. If they were fairies full of fancies caught from no earthly moon, then their authors could all be poets rollicking on winged pens. Or if childish minds perfectly matched bodies in well-being, romping, sleeping, and eating might leave no need for books at all. But no such simplicity is true to the facts. Whenever we congratulate ourselves on training up young citizens, our offspring turn into pixies with a longing for green cheese; when we reverse them because of their innocent eyes, they fasten on a muddy bank and are pulled off looking like earth-worms. Fact and fancy never untangle, savage and fairy live in one breast. A child, forsooth! How write for such a creature?

And not satisfied with inherent difficulty, we acquire trouble by placing our babe at birth in the bosom of adult life. We call the thousand and one sophisticated activities to which we introduce him none too gradually "a preparation for life," and fail to note that the phrase monopolizes the word "life" for our grown up selves. We overdo the sophisticating process more thoroughly all the time. And yet this impingement of our world on his does result in a firmly social supporting structure for his private affairs, and any book about or for children that ignores the existence of such a structure falsifies essential truth. As truly as a child lives in his own world, so truly does he live in ours, which is also his. So it is that we must not only face that complex being, a child, but in addition the difficult problem of his double environment.

But let us take heart. Difficulties inherent or acquired are the last things that trouble the young reader. The mixture of fact and fancy in himself would seem a perfectly natural one to a child if put in terms of the world as he sees it. Convention, indeed, divides the two, but life continually combines them. And as for the social world in which he needs must live, a youngster is too busy with his own concerns to trouble much about affairs in general except as a necessary interruption, a useful means, or a usually beloved background. Why cannot grown-up life take its place in children's books as in children's minds, casually and naturally, but squarely, with close relationships felt always, with sparrows falling occasionally, and book-homes full of fun and sadness all mixed up? Or else (since children are continually and prophetically living ahead as well as in their own present) why not let the grown-up aspect of things deck itself suitably to catch the childish eye and step from background to foreground? Why not let it emerge oftener as the hero of the piece, with knightly colors on its sleeve, the gayety of Harlequin in its antics, or even the fascinating sorrows of a Ulysses in its eyes?

Imaginative Books

By RACHEL FIELD

IT seems impossible to believe, but there are still people who labor under the delusion that a brightly colored wrapper, gay pictures, and large print constitute a good children's book. If you don't believe this method of selection is true, just try going into a juvenile book department some day before Christmas and see it in action for yourself. Not that there isn't something to be said in its favor, for it is natural to want to put the gayest and brightest into a child's hands. Only it just happens that sometimes what is being put into a child's mind at the same time gets forgotten! In spite of sanguine and sentimental juvenile reviewers and the illuring statements in publisher's catalogues, he genuinely imaginative child's book appears about as regularly as Halley's Comet, which leaves us with the distressing problem of what is to be done in between-times. We can't keep on giving out copies of "Alice in Wonderland" and Hans Andersen, of "Water Babies" and "Pinocchio," of the "Jungle Books" and "When We Were Very Young," indefinitely, and for the rest, how does one tell? The answer is, of course, that no one can. There is, how-

ever, one unfailing test by which a child's book (or any other for that matter) can stand or fall, and that is, did the author write it to please himself? You can usually tell, and though of course this may not mean that the book will become an imaginative classic, still it is almost sure to have vitality and spirit and a lack of condescension and self-consciousness.

If "Peacock Pie" had been ordinary, jog-trot verse Walter de la Mare surely couldn't have managed to keep his own mind on it and we should have missed "Miss T.," "Nod," "Nicholas Nye," "The Lost Shoe," and all the rest. Lewis Carroll would hardly have been interested in any land, Wonderland or otherwise, without humor and nonsense, and so Alice's adventures are what they are. Kate Greenaway, in a letter to a friend, confesses that she hurried through the fog and damp of a London winter morning, eager to reach her studio where soon she could make it spring for herself with daffodils and apple-blossoms in bloom and as many clean and capering children as she cared to have at play there.

This is the sort of thing that really counts in a child's book, or any other kind, for that matter,—this power of setting a world of one's own between two book covers. Hans Andersen did that and for the child lucky enough to have come to him young, an icicle will be something more than frozen water hanging in a point from some window sill; it will be all mixed up with the adventures of Kay and Gerda and the palace of the Snow Queen. Of present-day writers it is difficult to guess those who will be read and reread by the youngsters of tomorrow. Will Dr. Dolittle seem as droll and seriously-comic and will Margery Williams Bianco's little tales of wooden dolls, velveteen rabbits, and skin horses keep their spirit and charm? At any rate with Milne, Barrie, Walter de la Mare, Eleanor Farjeon, and others putting their imaginative best into books for boys and girls there seems little reason to complain even if for every really inspired child's book there must be a score or more of the usual "Dolly Dee in the Country," "Benny's Backyard Neighbors" type to counterbalance.

Charming Tales

THE LION-HEARTED KITTEN. Written and illustrated by PEGGY BACON. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1927. \$2.

THE LAST DRAGON. By DAN TOTTEROH. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. \$2.

TOO often the stories advertised as having been successfully told and retold by mothers to their children fall flat when they are transferred to the printed page, but this is not the case with Peggy Bacon's delectable book of animal stories. In these tales of beasts from independent kittens to mercenary camels, there is genuine literary skill, besides a really remarkable sense of form and style. And what humor! Even a very literal child would have to chuckle at the story of the brusque crocodile and the lion cub or the crafty minnow who saved himself from being eaten so successfully. Each of the twelve little tales is a model of compactness with every sentence vivid and important; dialogue brief and spirited, and action swift and satisfactory. Could any beginning be more enticing than this from "The Little Baby Zebra" story:

Once there was a baby Zebra who lived with his mother on the big brown prairie, and every day they went together to look for green grass to eat. But in summer the sun shone so long and so fiercely that the whole prairie looked like burnt toast.

Really no very little child should be without these tales.

Miss Bacon is already so well known for her etchings that these illustrations of hers for the book need little comment except to say that they are in her original spirit. Whether the conventionally minded child will like them as well as more realistic and pretty pictures of animals we cannot say, but certainly the adult reader will find them infinitely diverting.

"The Last Dragon," by Dan Totteroh, is written in a very different mood and manner, but it is about a dragon, so should have a place with other beasts that have

(Continued on next page)

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