

of a strong woman in the house with drunken husband and drunken brother; stark heroism through a dark winter; several kinds of revivalism, involved with rattlesnakes and copperheads; the horror of a mountain poorhouse; the equal horror of a negro tramp callously and brutally killed; mountain jamborees, at the belling of the bride and on a birthday; the almost epic description of the death of Battle Keaton; what fortitude it needs to be a Republican in those parts; psychic phenomena among the natives; and the extraordinary annals of the Powderjay family. Nor is that all of the book by a long shot.

Whether wildly humorous, as in "Governor of Kentucky," or grim and even macabre, these are stories worth reading; all written ruggedly and honestly, racy of the soil and the local folk-ways. There is the art too of the "natural-born" observer. Mr. Stuart has fresh and vital American material to present, and he knows his own people thoroughly.

Alvin Johnson's Novel

SPRING STORM. By Alvin Johnson.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THIS is a novel both naive and mature—naive in the elementary quality of its structure, mature in depicting certain levels of life among rural communities in the West. The fable concerns the coming of age of Julian Howard on the farm to which, when Julian is a boy, his dreamy father transports the Howard family—and we are rather afraid that the rotund speeches put into the mouth of the parent are intended to represent conversation among the cultivated classes. But the book is better than the elder Howard's philosophizings.

Young Julian meets three groups of people—the neighboring farmers, the masculine population of a bleak small town, and the shiftless and lovable squatters at the Bend, from whom he picks out his chum. The squatters are well enough done in a sense, albeit they are a little too uniformly sagacious and kindly for belief. But the triumph of the book is Mr. Johnson's penetration into the mind and conversation of the farmers and small-town young men—their scorn of the city dweller, their harping on sexuality, their shy and surly neighborliness. In Henry Millsbaugh the author has created one of the few wholly credible farmers in recent fiction. Julian falls in love with Henry's girl-wife, and the author's treatment of the denouement of this episode is not merely novel but strangely veracious.

Barring the elder Howard's conversation, the style is throughout competent and gracious, rising at intervals to placid beauty. Mr. Johnson's verbal economy is part of the strength of the novel.

From Iceland and Norway

MORNING OF LIFE. By Kristmann Gudmundsson. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AGNES ROTHERY

NOVELS about Iceland—or books of any sort about Iceland for that matter—are so rare that "Morning of Life" which is laid in that "cold and dreadful land" beside the "glitter of the sea and the radiance over the shining distant snowfield," has the immediate virtue of novelty. It is a genuine novel, the plot growing from its characters as they, in their turn, grow from the soil—if one may use that euphemism for the black lava sand of the beaches and the scanty turf of the meadows. The unusual local color is far more than perceptive bits of description, excellent as these are. It pierces the winter with the green and yellow northern lights: it envelops the summer with translucence, and it permeates the substance of the tale.

This novel by a young Icelander who gained many English readers with "The Bridal Crown" concerns itself with a group of coast fisherfolk who have been born by the basalt pillared bay and draw their provender from the thundering sea. It concerns old women like Lobba with red rimmed eyes, flaccid, mud colored face, and a mouth suggesting a scabbed-over gash; young women like the tall Salvr "with strong white neck and the bosom that rose and fell in healthy and luxuriant serenity," or girls like the lost Ingelin whose tender face floats forever through the dreams of Haldor Bessason. It concerns men who sit solidly on the thwarts of their ice covered boats, "sub-human in their untanned oiled leather clothing, and up to their knees in fish. Their arms and upper part of their bodies were as if grown to the oars they handled with a heavy joyless stroke." It is chiefly the story of that same Haldor Bessason, heroic and weak, who sins against the women who love him and, at prodigious cost, saves the lives of men who mistrust him: of Haldor and Salvr—first of their passion and then of their vicious desire for each other's ruin.

There are superb incidents, notably the shipwreck commencing with the storm which smashes Haldor's boat and flings the half drowned crew upon the iron boulders. This bit is supremely well done and so, in briefer compass, is Haldor's saving of the English yacht, and his rescue of Ragnar from the tawny flood of the river while the ice floes are forced through the rapids.

"Morning of Life" has emotional tension and magical wild setting.

Agnes Rothery is the author of "Sweden: The Land and the People," and "Finland: The New Nation."

BEYOND SING THE WOODS. By Trygve Gulbrandsen. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHILLIPS D. CARLETON

M. R. GULBRANSSEN has written with lyric romanticism of a Northern past. His tale is not of the peasant and his too religious devotion to the soil—a slow, careful story exact in its psychological probing; he tells us of the great houses who ruled the peasant, of feuds among the great landowners; his figures are a bit beyond life size, swollen by the passage of time to the dimensions of myth. A huntsman goes forth to slay a bear of the breed that has slain his ancestors, and is himself slain; an ancient battle axe drops from a beam overhead to warn a man meditating the conclusion of a long family feud. A proud pale lass waits for the word that will raise her from poverty and despair. "Beyond Sing the



TRYGVE
GULBRANSSEN

Woods" may well be a collection of the stirring events in the century-long chronicle of a ruling family in one of the narrow valleys in the Norwegian hills. The broad acres of farming land in the lower valley were held by a family of the old nobility. To the north beyond the great strip of woods, in the hills themselves, were the holdings of another family older and fiercer, who ruled amongst poor cotters, small farmers. The tale tells how this latter family of Bjorn-dal bred strong men, and how Von Gall of the broad acres lost his wealth and his pride. It tells of marriage and death, of how a sad misunderstanding was cleared and a fair bride won.

The author's knowledge of custom, his quick accurate delineation of characters, his loving care of minute detail give the novel a solid air of reality that it could never have if it were merely a tale of the old days written with a warm gusto. Mr. Gulbrandsen's writing will awaken a kind of nostalgia for the past in the reader.

"Beyond Sing the Woods" has none of that dreadful interest that Sigrid Undset could awaken in us over the misdoings of the fourteenth century; it lacks the very quiet charm of Selma Lagerlöf's early reminiscences of the great estates of Sweden. It is pleasant, moving, swift. We hope the reader turns to this vision of a world a spot more utopian than our present one.

The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

Round the May-Pole

The Knothole, April 23

IT'S not easy to stay indoors this morning. The air's clear and spicy as gin; still pared and sharpened by a blade of frost. It eddies down from the blue vacuum-bottle of upper emptiness, still tingled with shudders of that nothing. You lay your hands on outdoor things, rocks and stumps, to see if sun is palpable. Smell, the organ of memory, is acute. The fresh green paint on the dog-pen takes me back to a house that was being painted (yellow, green, and white) in the 1890's. The damp sooted whiff of the fireplace is exactly that of an old chimney I knew in Burgundy. That was in a 14th century stone turret; I wrote a sonnet there. Any place where one has written a sonnet, even a mediocre, is remembered. (No one remembers where he writes free verse.)

The temptation is to go out every half hour and see if anything has happened; any more leaves or flowers opened. The little knots of the dogwood have gapped and show the green granules. Three weeks hence they'll be silver propellers. Dandelions are out; and the first butterfly. Among the scrub the drifts of dead leaves (now washed and faded very pale) are warm. I feel like the adorable old lady who said to me the other day "I want to lie on an alehouse bench and snore."

I've just realized that today is Shakespeare's birthday. What did Shakespeare do on his Day? The host in *Merry Wives* said "he capers, he dances, he has eyes of youth, he writes verses, he speaks holiday, he smells April and May." And that very Shakespearean person the Old Soak, in one of the best spring poems of our time—retelling the story of David and Bathsheba—

*"You go and find her Husband's name
and other similar facks,"
Says the king to the Execushioner, "and
measure his neck for an ax;
For the turtle doves is singing sweet—
Oh, what the hell, it's Spring!
And just for the sake of argyment, I'll
show 'em who is king."*

Perhaps partly because my own birthday comes in the first week of the month, May Day has always been specially exciting to me. Occasionally I pass a hotel in New York which calls itself Mayfair—I wonder if it knows why? (The use of names without any curiosity about their origin always astounds me.) Do they put up a Maypole there in the courtyard and invite the expensive guests to curvet and caracole? They should. For it is named for that now fashionable region in Lon-

don (between Park Lane and Berkeley Square) where in earlier times the quality celebrated their spring frolic. It's odd, by the way, that the Pilgrims should have come over in the *Mayflower*; I'm surprised they didn't rename her, for any suggestion of the pagan rites of May must have been much against their liking. And how did the frivolous First come to be the radical and communist festival? Were Marx and Engels, when they lived in exile in London, enlivened by some cockney capers they saw on their strolls? Anyhow it was not inappropriate, for I suppose these two and the romantic Lassalle were the Robin Hood, Friar Tuck and Little John of the modern barons.—It always gives me a grin to hear that Karl Marx earned his living for many years by writing for the *New York Tribune*.

But I am not inclined to think of May Day as an occasion of economic emeute. At that season much-pestered humanity once resolved to forget its various annoy, to symbolize the evident fact that a great deal of life is farce and freak. There's a jovial book called *Merrie England in the Olden Time*, (republished in 1881 from an earlier appearance in *Bentley's Miscellany*) which in its sentimental way gives as many clues to economic history as Karl Marx. I have a notion that social truth is as often discovered by accident as when pursued with the knotted cudgel of a formula.

*Let men of learning plead and preach,
their toil 'tis all in vain:
Sure, labour of the heels and hands is
better than the brain—
And a dancing we will go.*

The merriment of Merry England has

been questioned by philology as well as history. Perhaps, as one of Shakespeare's angry proletarians says in Cade's rebellion (2nd Henry VI), "It was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up." But a fig for analysis. One rises from the book I mention in a May Day spirit, the mind a confusion of Robin Hood and Sir Roger de Coverley, harlequins and motleys, muffin-men and bear-wards, rummers of hot punch and tureens of oyster sauce, hobby horses and morris dancers, pick-plackets and pastry-cooks.

I like the fellow whose bid for the May season appeared in the *Daily Advertiser* of May 6, 1745:—

"To give notice to all Ladies and Gentlemen, at Spencer's original Breakfasting-Hut, by the New River fronting Sadler's Wells, may be had every morning, except Sundays, fine tea, sugar, bread, butter, and milk at fourpence per head; coffee at three halfpence a dish. Coaches may come up to the farthest garden-door next to the bridge. . . . Note—There is another person set up in opposition to me, the next door. Mine is the little boarded place by the river side."

Is it not, even to the details of parking-space and competition, exactly two Log Cabin Rests of today's Arterial Highway? Dare any sociologer pronounce *anything* new?

*When fields were dight with blossoms
white—*

(I'm still quoting from *Merrie England*)

*—and leaves of lively green,
The May-pole reared its flowery head,
and dancing round were seen
A youthful band, joined hand in hand,
with shoon and kirtle trim,*



MAY DAY REVEL, BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

International