

NEW FICTION —IN— VARIED FORMS

THE BRIGHT SHAWL. By Joseph Hergesheimer, New York. Alfred A. Knopf.

MR. HERGESHEIMER is one of those authors whom you think of primarily in terms of color. He sees life less as a tale that is told than as a succession of dissolving views. He delights in sharp, bright contrasts, and paints them glowingly with the pigment of vivid words. Whatever thesis lies behind his stories is always rigidly kept in the background. "Look at my pictures first," he seems to say, "and get my message afterward if you will." And the chief reason that he stands to-day among the few American novelists who may be seriously ranked with their foremost British contemporaries is that he is that rare combination of a verbal painter with a true color sense for the unerringly right word and a craftsman who never lets the story teller merge in the moralist and preacher.

When you recognize in Mr. Hergesheimer this inborn need of a rich opulence of hue, you marvel at the self-discipline by which he has often held down his style and given us page after page of calculated drabness—monochrome expressive of repressed, unhappy lives. "The Three Black Pennys" expressed in terms of painting is a study in heavy, dense shadows; life seen through an atmosphere of gloom. But he got his sharp contrasts none the less, in the deep, rich glow of the furnaces, the sudden flare of molten iron, the bright incandescence of a spraying shower of sparks from mighty hammers. There is much in common between "The Three Black Pennys" and that greatest study in black-and-white in the whole range of English fiction, Joseph Conrad's "Nigger of the Narcissus."

"The Bright Shawl," because it also chances to be laid in Cuba, must face inevitable comparison with "Cytherea"; and because it presents, in all its essentials except the stage setting, a sharp antithesis to the former volume, many eager partisans of "Cytherea" are going to find it disappointing. On the other hand, its very points of difference are likely to win the author a host of new devotees. "Cytherea" studied human frailty in the ripeness of mature years; "The Bright Shawl" studies austerity and self-sacrifice in the first glow of romantic youth. The former hero wrecks two homes, and lives on wretchedly, nursing bitter memories; the latter risks his life for an ideal, and his few glorious months are a solace to his old age. Perhaps the fairest comparison to make would be to admit that "Cytherea" embodies a less important theme unerringly worked out; "The Bright Shawl" is the bigger subject, less flawlessly achieved.

Briefly, this new volume, done in the predominant reds and yellows of the Spanish flag, tells the story of Charles Abbott's youth, as it comes back to him in old age, when Liszt's Spanish Rhapsody, heard by chance, transports him through forty years back to the "Incandescent sunlight of Havana," and shows him once again that matchless dancer, La Clavel, with "the superb flame of her body in the brutal magnificence of the fringed manton, like Andalusia incarnate."

Young Abbott, a wealthy idler of his day, is sent to Cuba because of weak lungs; and finding the country aflame with rebellion against the arrogance and brutality of the Spanish military officials, his impressionable soul catches the contagion of the dream of Cuban liberty. He forms swift friendship with an ardent band of young patriots, dedicates his fortune and his young life to this alien land which has first taught him the meaning of patriotism, and renounces all earthly pleasures as unworthy of his exalted purpose. Even the two beautiful women whom Spanish authorities throw in his path to spy upon him—first, La Clavel, the dancer, who betrays her masters and works for the cause; and later the treacherous half-caste, Pilar of Lima—find themselves powerless

to stir his senses or swerve him from his Quixotic purpose.

The book is a gorgeous panorama of Havana itself in its flamboyant exotic beauty; the gay, indolent, pleasure seeking life of the people; the brutality of the cock pits and bull fights; the studied arrogance of the Spanish soldiery; the ubiquitous network of the spies; the pervading proximity of sunshine and laughter, passion, hatred and death. The background is beyond reproach, the temperament of the people is interpreted with an understanding of the Latin nature quite remarkable in one who is not racially of them. The only thing which conspicuously marks this book as the work of an Anglo-Saxon rather than a remarkably smooth translation of a Spanish original is the dialogue. The Spanish race is incurably flowery in its formal politeness of speech; the current civilities between strangers are embroidered; even insults have the external flavor of a compliment. Mr. Hergesheimer makes his characters converse with a curt, monosyllabic directness of an Englishman, and to this extent he mars his picture. It is relatively a small matter, but it jars in much the same way as his habitual practice of Anglicizing localities, as Cuba street, the Montserrat Gate and a restaurant which he calls The Noble Havana.

FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

TALES OF THE JAZZ AGE. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Charles Scribner's Sons.

"**T**ALES of the Jazz Age" is surely not Mr. Fitzgerald's most important book; but it is by far the most interesting. In this collection he displays his amazing and still youthful verve and his virtuosity. He does many things, and does most of them well. In an elaborated "Table of Contents" he tells us various things about himself and his stories. Concerning the latter he is usually right. Though "Flappers and Philosophers" is not so good a book as "Tales of the Jazz Age" it is yet true that as a short story "The Off Shore Pirate" is still his best. As exquisite grotesquerie, however, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" excels, and I think few people realize how closely Mr. Fitzgerald approximates the skill of Aldous Huxley in this vein. Surely "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," with its high accomplishment in perverse imagination, is at least three-fourths as good as Huxley's "Nuns at Luncheon."

There is so much to admire in the writing of F. Scott Fitzgerald that those of us who admire him most are now hoping that he will grow up properly. The first section of this volume he calls "My Last Flappers." That is good. Exploits of drunkenness may be amusing and engaging; but after reading the first three stories in the book, though they are told excellently and sparkle with the unusual, one begins to feel like an "Old Soak" and not a particularly happy soak, either. There are folk who do splendid and romantic things when not drunk I suppose, and there is a large

section of the feminine younger generation which has never tasted a cocktail and can scarcely be called "flapper." A young married woman recently told me that she detested the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald. "Such girls don't exist," she affirmed. "At least I haven't been able to find them." In her particular little set they don't. She was mentally so secure in her determined puritanism that she had forgotten what she had told me not an hour before, i. e., that her sister, of sub-deb age, was "thoroughly disgusted" with the antics of her particular little set. So it goes. One cannot generalize on the application of an ethical code these days! However, Mr. Fitzgerald might with satisfactory results shift his little set and find a group of persons to write about whose spare hours are not quite so many and whose crystal gazing is not all done in the wine glass. This younger generation, just passing now, has

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