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Esther Gould's Book Corner

JUST PARAGRAPHS

The third of May will see, we hope, the publication of Norman Douglas' novel, "In the Beginning," the first novel from his pen in nearly ten years. Those who have read any of his work, particularly "South Wind," are looking forward to its advent.

There are limits even to American efficiency! The publishers of Captain del Castillo's "True Conquest of Mexico" are stumped by the amount of mail the Captain is receiving. Requests to know how he feels about prohibition, pacifism, bomb terrors, etc., pour in, but he has left no forwarding address. Having lived in the Sixteenth Century and been the companion-in-arms of Cortez, "He is immortal but out of reach, unfortunately, of the services of the press clipping bureaus."

GENIUS OR TALENT?

"HANGING JOHNNY"

By Myrtle Johnston
D. Appleton and Co.

"A novel of genius" acclaims the London Spectator of "Hanging Johnny," by eighteen year old Myrtle Johnston. Yet genius is such an ephemeral thing, who can catch the authentic note of it at close range? Isn't it only, ironically enough, when we hear it across the years, even across the ages that we can be sure that it is there? But "Hanging Johnny" is certainly a novel of talent, extraordinary talent and skill for a girl of eighteen. She has done without a single flaw in technique what she started out to do.

What she started out to do was this, to tell the story of "Hanging Johnny," an Irish executioner with the ascetic face of a poet, a timid sensitive, superstitious, ignorant man. A queer man for an executioner. But Fate had made him follow in the steps of his own father and once having gone into the gruesome work a strong and awful fascination holds him to it. We see how, in the end, his own son raised on the stories of his father cannot resist telling, may follow in his footsteps, too. "Shall I get your ropes and strops, daddy? I wish you'd take me

with you. I'd like to see someone hanged."

This is a story of forces which are stronger than man or woman, forces of passion and fanaticism and fear which sway these ignorant sensitive people as easily bent aspens are swayed in the wind. They create the forces, themselves, and then flee from them to destruction.

It is a queer story, simply and tellingly written. If it lacks anything it is emotional depth. There are no striking attributes of style nor is there a single passage over-written or a single unnecessary word. When Miss Johnston wishes to say something she says it with a directness and effect which recall Willa Cather, for instance, "Then the familiar musty leathery smell of the shop—such a little thing as that—gave her courage in face of this thing she could not understand." So much effort might have been wasted to achieve less effect.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

"KIT CARSON"

By Stanley Vestal
Houghton Mifflin Co.

In the recent deluge of Western stories which has followed our re-discovery of American frontier life, Kit Carson, one of the most famous, perhaps the most famous of those frontiersmen, has escaped capture. But now Stanley Vestal has done it in "Kit Carson, Happy Warrior of the Old West."

Mr. Vestal's book is well written though not strikingly so. He has knowledge of his subject and sympathy for the old West but he has not been blessed by a more than ordinary gift of expression. Yet for those who love or know the West, the statement of fact is enough, one's own imagination supplies the overtones of thrills and adventure. One loves the names of the places and to reconstruct the life of those fearless fighting trappers and mountain men blazing their trail across the great wilderness. As Mr. Vestal says, Carson's "endless journeys through the wilderness make the fabled Mediterranean wanderings of Odysseus seem week-end excursions of a stay-at-home."

Kit Carson was a shy diffident man, perhaps no one even among his companions knew him well, perhaps that is why at the end of this volume we do not know him well either. We know a great deal about him but we do not know him.

Mr. Vestal has brought out many interesting facts, such as that the practice of scalping was originated by white men, for heads, on which there was a price, were too difficult to carry. He goes on to say that probably more Indians were scalped by Whites than Whites by Indians. He also tells how the coming of the silk hat into fashion spoiled the beaver trade and planted in the trappers' mind that hatred of the "topper" which he then passed on to real He-Men for all times.

It is an interesting book, one which it is worth while reading.

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By Ben Ames Williams

"Though read in broad daylight, in the midst of a noisy society, the creeping dread of that horrifying night sent cold ripples up and down my usually tractable spine."—Bruce Gould, N. Y. Evening Post.

E. P. Dutton & Co. N. Y.