

REVIEWS

THE PATH THROUGH PENGUIN CITY. By HARRY R. LILLIE.
Ernest Benn. 25s.

This book is about whaling not penguins and might even gain by the omission of penguins from the story. Penguins are almost dragged in, and as persons, in a way I find too anthropomorphic and too childish to accept easily. To write of animals "going their way through life in happiness through unselfishness" seems to me silly and surely it takes an exceptionally able writer to make his animals speak effectively. Even more surely six-year-old human talk should be avoided. "But please we do like our big whale friends. The bad Orcas eat us if we don't dodge them fast enough, but we do so love Fin Whale, and big Bluey, and Humpy is such fun," etc., etc., is to my mind unworthy stuff for a serious book for adults about what Dr. Lillie clearly shows is a desperately serious subject.

In most of his book Lillie is the doctor of a whaling expedition to the Antarctic and, when he turns to whaling, all the whimsy is left behind. Among the dead and dying whales and the men who kill them, he tells a grim and terrible story with great force and sympathy. He is obsessed—with good reason—with the cruelty of the explosive harpoon. First comes half an hour's gruelling chase, then the shot and a 150 lb. weapon loaded with black powder bursts inside the whale's body; sometimes near the head, when death may come quickly, but a hit in a vital spot is very difficult. Usually the explosion takes place in the whale's abdomen and an agonizing struggle follows.

Lillie does not stay in the factory ship and write at second hand. He goes with a "catcher" and terribly describes, with photographs, the chase and the fifty-five minutes spent in killing a fin whale. An even worse story comes from another catcher—a big female blue whale, far advanced in pregnancy—five hours, nine harpoons. There is no way of telling a pregnant female before shooting but "These mothers fight desperately hard for their lives and those of their unborn babies".

Must this terror go on? Dr. Lillie tells of the experiments with an electric harpoon which, started before the last war, were renewed at his instigation with the help of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. Little now stands between the old methods and this comparatively painless instrument of death, except apathy and the reluctance of the whaling gunners to change their time-honoured methods.

I would do this book less than justice if I left it here. Lillie

deals with conservation of whales and seals and gives us good descriptions of his journeys and something of his experiences and his philosophy. Very interesting all of it, and through it runs the theme "consideration for animals", the dominating passion of Dr. Lillie's life.

C. L. B.

A BORDER COUNTY : *Field Sports and Wild Life in Northumberland*. HENRY TEGNER. Robert Hale. 16s.

A number of better-than-average guide books have been written about the Border Country (which is itself a far better-than-average domain) and a dozen books or so on the "huntin', shootin' and fishin'" enjoyed by Border sportsmen have long since risen from local to national repute: authors like J. G. Millais and Abel Chapman spring to mind. One might think that all worth telling had been told—but no! for this remarkable little book by Henry Tegner contrives to become the "better half" of them one and all. From stem to stern it is laden with just those very points the inquiring countryman from another area would want to know; the current coin of the countryside passed on from man to man, most of which in the ordinary way never finds its way into print at all. He leaves the obvious to others. He gives no detailed accounts of notable runs with any of the dozen Border packs of hounds; no record bags from famous Northumbrian moors; no tedious tally of things slain; no long lists of birds observed, and he is so refreshingly free of the clichés and hyperbole of the sporting-journalist—yet, drawing upon his own experience, an incident here, a discovery there, you get the very core of what Northumberland has to offer to the discerning sportsman-naturalist. And few other counties in Britain can compare with it: of this Henry Tegner, whose interests cover every field and who has explored its possibilities for a quarter of a century, has no doubt at all and, in his book, gives ample evidence to back up his opinion. His findings, moreover, are recorded fairly, without fear or favour and with obvious sincerity: a man anxious to learn and ready to tell the truth.

It is commonly said that shooting men make good naturalists and conservors of wild life, inferring presumably that they know the various birds and beasts found on their estates and take the trouble to find out, *for themselves*, enough about how these creatures live and what they eat, to say which should be left alone, which shot at sight. Such honest men exist, but the wish, alas! is only too often father to the thought: a talk with the keeper and a glance at the vermin pole soon acquaints any