

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Prize Poem Competition

IN "Certain People," a collection of short stories by the accomplished author of "Summer," "The Glimpses of the Moon," and other notable novels, Mrs. Wharton, with sure and subtle understanding, touches upon widely differing environments, social conditions, and the secret springs of mind and spirit animating her puppets. For fidelity of portraiture and skilfully suggested atmosphere, "The Refugees" is a small and consummate work of art. An inoffensive little American professor of languages, travelling in France in 1914, finds himself swept into the world vortex, is mistaken for a refugee by an enthusiastic English spinster, taken under her wing in spite of stammering endeavours at explanation, and hurried with hundreds of struggling unite to London. Willy-nilly the bewildered and inarticulate little man is hurried to one of England's ancestral homes, which appeals to a latent vein of romance, and proves so beautiful and congenial a haven that he succumbs to the temptation of making a brief sojourn, under false colours, in this new and intriguing world. Mrs. Wharton's subtle and succinct analysis of activities of certain war-time ladies of high degree, each intent, with enthusiasm and without humour, on what was known colloquially as "doing her bit," makes excellent reading: manners, oddities and extravagances having been observed with meticulous accuracy, and set down for our delectation, if not in malice, with a substratum thereof that adds literary salt and savour to this excellent impression of a section of English society in abnormal times.

"Atrophy" tells of a woman's attempt to see her lover in his last illness. Leaving convention overboard, she visits his home, where, beautiful, daring and gifted though she is, she is balked, intimidated, and incontinently driven forth by an apparently ineffective, but bitter and vindictive female relation of the dying man; who exercises, without a spark of pity or generosity, the power in domestic milieu conferred by imminent approach of death. This is a masterly presentation of a type that, unable to inspire devotion, resents and revenges itself upon the beloved woman.

"A Bottle of Perrier" has a touch of stark horror that makes it memorable, in its visualisation of stark tragedy enacted amid unutterable loneliness of the African desert. The continuity and cumulative effect of this story of murder, with Nemesis in hot pursuit, are conveyed rather than narrated; and in reading it we record impression that the hand of the creator of Ethan Frome has not lost its cunning.

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is divided between "Elizabeth Anne" and "Ginger," for "Similitudes" and "Autumn Evening" respectively. We have adopted this course as being a fair one, each of the poems mentioned having, in our opinion, an equal degree of merit. The latter appears in this publication, but, owing to pressure on space, "Similitudes" will be held over for publication next week.

"Awake, Awake, Our Patriotic Pride": The first verse of this ambitious effort conveys topical counsel in swinging rhyme; but later, words and expressions are utilised that assuredly do not lend themselves to metrical expression.

*"Until the politicians find a way  
The penny postage rates to give us back,"*

Though a consummation devoutly to be wished, does not suggest inspiration of magical Muse.

"Poppies": It's been so much better done.

"Bush Boys": We suggest that a paper for juveniles might prove the best avenue for appearance of this somewhat immature contribution.

D.A.S.: You are under a misapprehension as to the words "Selected for commendation." They imply no promise of publication, but are simply an expression of appreciation of work appealing to us as above average merit, though not up to prize-winning standard.

"Milk" is an interesting attempt to convey life in the real, as apprehended by eye and ear of sensitive awareness.

"Moonspun Dreams": Truly an apt title, breathes responsiveness of romantic youth to nature's beauty.

"Merrie" is possessed of at least one attribute of poesy: imaginative vision. But obscurity of phrasing should be guarded against, and much study devoted to rhythmic effect.

"Pippa" is a brave lass, but over-pessimistic for her years. She should read Browning's poem about her namesake and take heart of grace.

"Clarion": Words, words, words, signifying nothing at all.

## ... Autumn Evenings ...

*Slowly the days draw in—so slow,  
We scarce see Summer go;  
Slowly the leaves drift down,  
The clouds sink low;  
Warmly the red fires glow—so warm;  
Far, far outside the storm  
Seems just a fantasy.  
Vague thoughts take form—  
Puppets against a curtain of pipe smoke—  
Love, dream, dance to and fro;  
Slowly at last they fade . . .  
So slow we scarcely know.*

—"Ginger."

THE B.B.C. gives its listeners a diversified and fascinating literary diet, ranging from the classics, represented by six talks on "The Dialogues of Plato," and a survey of Virgil and his times, to "Modern Literature," the exposition of the latter being entrusted to Mr. J. C. Squire, the witty and erudite critic, essayist and poet. Mr. Desmond MacCarthy and Miss V. Sackville-West, both novelists of note, give regularly over the air concise reviews of books; Mr. Duff Cooper and Mr. Michael Sadlier discourse on novels that are new; while Mrs. Oliver Strachey is responsible for morning talks on "Books about People." An interesting programme, expounded by a galaxy of able and interesting "people of importance" in their field, who without doubt are competent to mingle manner and matter into an attractive whole.

TO many omnivorous novel-readers the name of Horace Annesley Vachell is one with which to conjure. My own predilection for this versatile and agreeable writer dates from when the world was much younger, and I made acquaintance with "Quinney's," which I found delightful, and "The Hill," which held me enthralled. Not up to that high standard is all of Mr. Vachell's considerable output, but invariably it has an attractive flavour for his large and admiring retinue, who will find much entertainment and considerable matter for reflection in his latest work, "Into the Land of Nod." Primarily a deification of maternal love and self-abnegation, it is also the story of Michael Lynn, his loves and struggles and years of wanderjahr. In the family history of this engaging youth is an hereditary taint which, skipping his own generation, is transmitted to his child, begotten of an idyll of light love in his roivings in Brittany. Nemesis exacts heavy toll from Michael and his beautiful Primrose, between whom flames a passion which suggests comparison with "Paul and Virginia," that classic of tragic youth. Michael goes through dark days of tribulation, but regeneration is effected through love and sacrifice, his son's physical taint is overcome—a fact accepted with some strain on one's credulity—and the story finishes on a hopeful note of courage and high endeavour.

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