

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Our Fortnightly Book Review

### "MISS MOLE"

By E. H. YOUNG

THE two Australian ladies who write under the name of M. Barnard Eldershaw showed their mettle when they produced that admirable, if rather lengthy, novel entitled "A House is Built." Now the collaboration is to the fore again with "Green Memory," which is perhaps a still better book. The scene is the Australia of the sixties, where a proud family is brought to poverty and disgrace by the suicide of its head. The eldest and finest daughter determines to take all responsibilities on her shoulders and, giving up the rich man she loves, lives only to carry out the task she has set herself. She fails, and recognises that she has failed, but the book ends on a happier note than one somehow anticipated. The story is well told, the narrative sustained, and a rich and ripe philosophy of life prevails.

ONE does not always find oneself in accord with writers of American fiction, but Miss Susan Glaspell is a writer who makes definite appeal. "Brook Evans" was outstanding, and now comes "Ambrose Holt and Family," a delightful story of universal application. Ambrose himself does not appear for some time after the story opens. He left his wife twenty-seven years ago, and meantime his son had grown up and married, with children of his own, and is, in conjunction with other things, by way of being a poet. And somehow or other his poetry comes between his wife and himself, and he goes away. Then returns old Ambrose and fascinates his daughter-in-law, changing her into one who may be taken into the secret world of poesy. So all comes right in the end, as it sometimes does, this last story of Miss Glaspell's being an excellent one.

"CHARLOTTE'S ROW" is a mean and sordid street in an industrial town in the Midlands, and Mr. H. E. Bates, the author of the novel of that name, does not mince his words in his description of the inhabitants thereof, giving a stark, vivid, and unforgettable picture. There are also passages of beauty, when even the denizens of "Charlotte's Row" wander into the woods and fields, which the author so well knows how to depict. The chief protagonist of the tale is a drunken shoemaker; a man of violence, in his cups a devil, and yet not wholly bad—a victim of the fell clutch of circumstance, poverty, violence, the lack of privacy or freedom. Truly, the veil is here lifted from the lives of those dwellers in the shadow of whom Mr. Bates writes with so fine a pity and comprehension.

A NEW novel by Miss E. H. Young is a notable event in the literary world, as all will agree who remember the whimsical, wise and witty "William," whose acquaintance I made long syne, and who travels with me wheresoever I go. And in "Miss Mole" she shows, as in her earlier work, an irrepressible humour, tender humanity and a love of all things beautiful, both in the animate and inanimate world.

The heroine is a spinster approaching the dismal forties; not fair to outward view, but with a shining spirit. poor in this world's goods, yet with an unquenchable belief that in some good hour the sails of her ship she flutter over the horizon. She earns her living in the household of a clergyman whose household, besides the amusing cleric himself, is made up of two trying daughters and an attractive scamp of a nephew who has the good taste to approve the charming Hannah, and with delicious inconsequence, on first acquaintance dubs her his Mona Lisa.

The book has a touch of Cranford in the portrayal of the quiet and lovely landscape, and sure and subtle comprehension of infinitesimal gradations of human character in a narrow provincial town. The characters assuredly live and move and have their being and we know them as well as we know our sisters and cousins and aunts. There is the next-door neighbour with his cats and parrots, his wide knowledge of the world's ways and caustic comments thereon; the Riddings, that tragic pair: Uncle Jim; and kind, stolid Mr. Blenkinsop, who is such a good sort and very rightly is in the picture when Hannah comes into her kingdom.

The gods, though denying her beauty bestowed upon Miss Mole a quick brain, witty tongue, and sensitive response and adoration of the beauty of the outdoors. Extremely entertain-

ing are her audacious sallies and quirks, enabling her to hold her own with her hypocritical and pompous employer, his hysterical progeny, her resuscitated romance, and the parish snob. There are charming touches of description. For instance: "There was her walk on the hill overlooking the water, with the bright tree showing through a grey mist which seemed to darken when the wings of a swooping gull flashed through it; there was the sound of unseen ships hooting or booming at the turn of the river, and standing there with the soft rain on her face she marvelled at the richness of human life. She had a feeling of sovereignty: she could make what she liked of her world. A magician, changing ships into leviathans."

Again: "She caught sight of herself in the glass, and remembered that pathos without beauty is merely irritating, that a woman with a long nose could not be touching in her sadness. In the comparative unimportance of a man's features, she reluctantly found proof of some sort of superiority in the other sex, and in trying to remember Mr. Blenkinsop's face, she could recall no more than a clear skin, an impression of solid worth and a pair of spectacles."

As an example of a social climber Mrs. Spenser-Smith is excellent, "skillfully varying the warmth for each newcomer, and by the slight changes in her cordiality marking the worldly position or soundness of doctrine of every individual seeking her favour." An attractive book from start to finish, with excellent "jacket" depicting the quaint little town of Radstowe, consummate command of graceful narrative, mordant wit, and unerring portrayal of rancours and jealousies, misunderstandings and reconciliations, that go on in the streets and primrose paths of an insignificant small social centre. And the ending is happy and

THE interest in diaries which Lord Ponsonby has aroused by his fascinating anthologies has brought several old diaries to light. One of these is that of Peter Russell, who was a prisoner of war in France from 1806 to 1914. It has been edited by his great-grandson, Mr. G. A. Turner, and is illustrated by water-colour drawings.

IN the thronging characters of "In the Portico," to which we are introduced by the Baroness von Hutten, we are glad once more to meet our old love Pam, characteristically casual, and almost as vital and arresting as of yore. In this latest book of short stories by a writer who came into her own some twenty years ago, the milieu changes from Mayfair to Camden Town, differing types are portrayed in able and amusing fashion, the whole going with the old captivating verve and vivacity.

IN "Mr. Punch's Motor Book" the whole story of motoring is covered in a collection of about 100 pictures, and every variety of motorist and victim comes in for attention from the genial Mr. Punch. Even the fashions of the period between 1895 and 1931 can be studied in these pages, and the modern girl driver in a beret and sports suit can prove by these pictures that mother really went motoring with a voluminous veil over a wide hat, incredible as it may appear. The road-hog is flayed gently, the exasperating wife who tries to be helpful inspires several jests, the old car does not receive the consideration due to its age, the jokes about the Baby will cause even its owners to smile, and the inconsiderate women drivers get what they deserve. This is a book no motorist will dare to confess he has not seen and the anti-motorist must get it to equip himself with gibes at the expense of his car-mad friends.

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