

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Our Fortnightly Book Review

### "THE INKY WAY"

By Alice Williamson

ONE of Mr. Victor Gollancz's latest enterprises is a "Holiday Omnibus," a volume of a thousand pages containing three novels, one by Gaboriau; four short stories, one by Lady Eleanor Smith, and three chapters "from real life." Mr. Besier's play, "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," is included with Mr. Humbert Wolfe's "This Blind Rose." Mr. Gollancz is also going to give us Mr. Fagan's play, "The Improper Duchess."

EVERYBODY nowadays writes his or her own autobiography. An unusual one appears this week called "In the Days of the Giants," by Mr. W. J. Doherty, the "fighting quarryman," who was at one time middle-weight champion of Africa and heavy-weight champion of Australia. The book is sponsored by young Lord Knabworth, who says that it "breathes the finest and best atmosphere which the boxing world has ever known."

MR. DESMOND COKE, the writer of stories of school life, who has died at Worthing at the age of 51, was in his own words "an incurable collector of objets d'art." But he was an unlucky collector, for shortly before the war almost all his treasures were destroyed in a fire, and in 1928 the collection of Rowlandson drawings which he had lent to the Tate Gallery was damaged by the Thames flood. For ten years Mr. Coke was a master at Clayesmore School.

THE "Life of Sir Edmund Gosse," by the Hon. Evan Charteris, will be eagerly looked for by the literary cognoscenti. Gosse was the reconciler of the Ancients and the Moderns. He never lost his reverence for the great writers of the nineteenth century, in whose pages his youth and earlier manhood had been passed. But his respect for the eminent Victorians stopped a long way this side of idolatry. Because Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne had written splendid verse, it did not follow that the tale of English poetry was closed for ever. Nor did he think that George Eliot and Meredith were the last novelists worth reading. Gosse was just as much interested in the newest phases of literary activity, in France and England, as in those of the past, and had a keen eye for les jeunes, not only for their works, but for themselves. As a consequence he himself kept young in mind and spirit to the end. It seemed hard to think of him as old, even when he was really so by the calendar.

EVERYBODY read the Williamson books a couple of decades ago. Those gay tales of motoring trips and trials by the talented collaborators, C. N. and A. Williamson. Now that this happy partnership—happy in every sense of the word—is dissolved for ever, Mrs. Williamson again takes up the pen she wields with energy, ability, and charm, and in her reminiscences in "The Inky Way" tells the gay, brave tale of the life together, literary, social and personal, of herself and her handsome and gifted husband, Charles Williamson.

She could always write stories, even in America, where she spent a happy girlhood, and was taught that "you could be a gentlewoman only if you were gentle; that manners weren't good unless you were kind."

Wealthy relatives were desirous of taking the gifted and beautiful niece for a trip to Europe, but as it turned out she chose liberty and independence and life in London, taking the risks with a gay heart. For her first few months in the great city she had little money and no friends, but both these drawbacks were speedily remedied, for it would seem Mrs. Williamson was born for success and a place in the sun. Soon she met "Charlie" Williamson, able journalist and dashing young man about town, and on both sides it was love at first sight. Thus began an idyll of comradeship in work and in play, and a great romance that ended only when they came to "Crucifix Corner," and Charles Williamson, like many another good and brave man, as a result of overstrain during the years of war, passed beyond the voices of the world he loved so well.

But before that time came there were many happy years, and in spite of hard striving, strenuous days, and tight financial crises, this is not a sad book, but essentially gay and courageous. Inexpressibly amusing is the account of their adventures in what was

then a new method of travelling—the automobile. "Our first car's entity," says the author, "was capable of any crime, as it proved in mud and blood during that odyssey. After crossing the Channel, its true nature appeared—a beast, a brute, a curse. Oh, how we hated it, little dreaming that we should owe to it what came of fame and fortune." For that journey provided "copy" for their first book together, "The Lightning Conductor," Mrs. Williamson supplying the fiction and "Charlie" the photographs and facts. Besides working on the novel that was destined to make them famous, clever Mrs. Williamson during the journey succeeded in regularly sending instalments of six different serials to the Harmsworth magazines.

In the book are described their many and delightful homes in England and on the Continent, where they lived happily and generously, meeting most people, in Europe and elsewhere, who were worth the knowing, and the author shows an extraordinary knack of description, so that her personalities live in the imagination. Thus she describes their first landlord when they returned to England from that early arduous journey: "So ancient that he was among the few living veterans of the Crimean War, and the handsomest old man imaginable. His profile might have been graven on a Roman coin, but his grammar would have disgraced a charity school child. His favourite maxim, 'Right's right, the world over.'"

Later they bought another car and toured Germany, dropped down to the Riviera, and studied Monte Carlo and its habits, the book making running comment on powers and potentates of all sorts and conditions with whom they rub shoulders.

This is Mrs. Williamson's first impression of the then Sir Alfred Harmsworth: "Almost boyish, with big blue eyes, and that fair-famous lock falling over the high forehead. Surprised by

"MONEY Writes" is the title chosen by Mr. Upton Sinclair for his new volume of literary criticism, and Miss Katherine Mayo's new book, "Volume Two" is a commentary on the 5000-page report of the "Age of Consent" Committee in India. The admirers and detractors of Miss Mayo's much-discussed earlier book, "Mother India," will await her latest effort with eagerness.

IN "Hope Against Hope," recently published, Miss Stella Benson is up to her best literary form, and that, her admirers do not need to be told, is high praise. She is so able and so detached in her methods, such a keen observer and satirist. The stories are slight in plot, and some of the characters of no great interest, but Miss Benson's deep knowledge of humanity, her fastidious sense of style, and sure touch upon emotion, make it as outstanding as her earlier books.

his startling good looks and his youthfulness, it occurred to me that he was like pictures of Napoleon."

Of George Meredith she comments: "We saw the great man among the flowers, his silver head of perfect shape, and ivory-coloured profile gleaming statue-like above red ranks of roses. I hadn't believed it possible that he could spout the dazzling epigrams which sparkle in his books, but he was born that way and couldn't help it. Having tea with him was like having tea with a king ought to be and isn't."

And there is poignant note: "For years I knew well, and always delightfully, Sir Arthur Pearson, with his nest of big and little magazines. Dark, with extraordinarily brilliant brown eyes, destined to lose their light one day. One afternoon, just before the war, I met him on the steps of the Hotel de Paris at Monte Carlo. 'Is it twilight already?' he asked. 'Or—do I only think so?' A startled glance showed me that over the brilliance of those brown eyes a slight dimness had fallen, like an intangible mist. And a few years later, when the dimness had thickened to impenetrable fog, Sir Arthur said to me: 'I am glad to be blind, because if I had kept my sight I should never have thought of St. Dunstan's. Being able to do something for the poor chaps who have sacrificed their eyes in the war more than repays me for what I've lost or suffered.' The next greatest blind man to Homer and Milton."

The book covers a wide canvas, and is a clear-cut, true, and brilliant picture of many events; of an entire sophistication, yet ingenious in parts, and always written with an engaging frankness.

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