

.... With BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Prize Poem Competition

IN "The Man with the Black Patch," by F. E. Verney, the hero, a peer with a silly-ass exterior, takes effective action in sheeting home the guilt to the villain of the piece. Mr. Verney has a light touch, and his latest book has been recommended by the Crime Book Society.

MRS. COMPTON MACKENZIE has turned author in the wake of her brilliant husband, and has written a story about Queen Christina of Sweden under the title of "The Sybil of the North." The Queen, who was clever and beautiful, received an almost masculine upbringing, assuming the reins of government at the age of 18, and being crowned, at the age of 24, with the title of "King."

"STARDUST," by Mr. D. L. Murray, is the tale of a circus, its ups and downs, its acrobats and horses, and riders and clowns. The romance is told, the glamour, the squalor, the success, and the pitfalls. It is a quickly moving, vivid story of both before the curtain and behind the scenes, and the characters—the old man who, after running his circus for years, is sold up, his clever daughter who rises to stardom, the villainous Joe Nixon—all these, and more, rivet interest and will remain in the memory.

IN "Son of Woman," Mr. Middleton Murry has written an intensely sympathetic study of the life of D. H. Lawrence. "What Lawrence was, not what he pretended to be, is of importance to mankind," says Mr. Murry, and it is to Lawrence's books he has turned for the revelation. There is scarcely a glimpse throughout of the Lawrence Katherine Mansfield knew when she wrote of him after a visit in 1918: "I loved him. He was just his old merry, rich self, laughing, describing things, giving you pictures, full of enthusiasm and joy in a future where we all become 'vagabonds.'" It is with Lawrence's "thought-adventures" that Mr. Murry is concerned, and he traces the splendid, tumultuous, despairing Odyssey through the whole range of Lawrence's writings, from "The White Peacock" to "The Man Who Died." It is the tragedy of a human soul intolerably divided against itself. That Lawrence was less concerned with art than with the passionate outpourings of his self-explanation is to Mr. Murry a proof of his eminence. He was too big for art; he was "a prophet, a psychologist, a philosopher"; but in the end Mr. Murry finds him a prophet who failed, who betrayed and bewildered those who would have followed him, who mingled truth and falsehood to utter confusion. It is a sorrowful book, and it is impossible to read it without a feeling of overwhelming compassion.

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to "Ginger" for the poem entitled "Winter." Poetic in conception and skilful in phraseology, the winning effort will appeal also by virtue of its suggestion that, though meantime our days are cold and dark and dreary, yet is "spring not far behind." The work of a new contributor, "Novitius," is interesting and vital in sentiment and expression, though not up to prize-winning standard.

G.F.: We regret that, through a printer's mischance, your prize poem, "Dust," appearing in our issue of June 26, was rendered imperfect by the fourth line being juggled beyond recognition.

"Karahia": Your work holds elements of originality and unexpectedness—both precious qualities—though the poem submitted has certain blemishes.

"The Old Room," one imagines, is a pleasant place in which to dream dreams, but your description is altogether too meticulous.

"Novitius": "Christina" is our favourite of the poems received. One remembers in one's youth a haunting poem by Robert Browning of the same name, but of different treatment. As to your query, we are willing that a prize-winning poem appearing in these columns should be published elsewhere, provided our consent is asked beforehand.

"Francois": Not a poem, but a testimonial.

"Wild Rose": You have a pretty gift of conveying vagrant fancy in what, in the Victorian era, would have been termed a dainty fashion.

"Marmion": The first, not "the last words of Marmion," are distinctly promising.

"Philanthropist": Not quite the time or the place for your Muse.

"Close-up": Misplaced enthusiasm.

Winter

Earth is cold;
Last leaves shiver on the oak;
Winter clutches tight his cloak;
He is old,
And his beard is withered white
As the snow, his failing sight
Has the dimness of grey night
In mist's fold.
Errant winds go searching by;
Chilled birds flash against the sky,
Hungry, bold.
Earth is wan;
But sap tingles in the roots,
Here and there are sticky shoots,
And there shone
Once—or was it just a dream?—
In the East a primrose gleam;
There are violets, too. . . . 'Twould seem
Rest is gone.
Ere his grim heart skips a beat
Winter's frail, frost-bitten feet
Hurry on.

"Ginger."

MR. C. S. FORESTER'S new book, "Two-and-Twenty" is almost too good to be true. There is a young medical student who writes popular verse and starves, then becomes a professional boxer, and meets a fairy god-mother disguised as a landlady. There is a young massense who falls in love with the poet; they marry, and all ends merrily as an old-time romance. For all its obvious sentiment, this is a charming story and a joyful oasis in much that is sad and bad and mad in recent fiction.

IN "Jew Suss Oppenheimer," by Dr. Curt Elwenspoek, curiosity may be satisfied anent the original of Herr Feuchtwanger's remarkable novel. He was, according to his biographer, a great financier, gallant and adventurer; but he was also a great scoundrel. It is not usual to bestow the title of great financier on one whose talents were devoted to devising methods of atrociously unjust and oppressive taxation; we usually term such men extortioners. An adventurer, yes; and of the basest and most unscrupulous kind.

"ADVENTURES are to the adventurous." This proverb certainly finds verification in the career of Mr. A. G. Hales, veteran traveller and journalist, whose book, "Broken Trails," relates the tale of his world-wide wanderings. An adventurer born, Mr. Hales preferred the open spaces, the wind and the tempest, and the bright eyes of danger to taking his ease at an inn. And in his virile chronicle he relates in characteristic fashion the great lessons life has taught him. "At first," he says in one passage, "I was blinded by the glamour of war, and I liked fighting when opportunity came. But I had to be flogged by the whips of fate in the stern hand of life to estimate values properly. Life is like that—you suffer, and you remember." An excellent book of its class.

MR. SACHEVERELL SITWELL has entered the realm of fiction in the guise of a writer of short sketches which are not nearly so highbrow as might have been anticipated. "Far from my Home" tells quite ingeniously of everyday happenings in the world at the present juncture. There is the picture of out-of-works endeavouring to make money by going the round of the streets in the guise of a military band; the story of an unhappy girl on a summer holiday; the last visit of a man to his light-o'-love; and other sketches, all apparently of slight import, but written with the pen of an expert, as was to be expected when the author is a member of the undoubtedly brilliant, if exasperating, Sitwell triumvirate.