

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Our Fortnightly Book Review

"Women and Children Last"

By Beverley Nichols

MISS MARY GRACE ASHTON, who has brought out a book called "The Lonely Journey," has written four or five novels although she is still in the early twenties. She was seventeen when her first book, "Race," appeared. Miss Ashton was born in Cairo, and claims descent from John Bunyan.

A TURKISH girl's personal recollections of life in her own country from the days of Abdul Hamid to the present time are set forth in "Unveiled," by Selma Ekrem. The writer's family was of the official class, so that we have glimpses of the nervous strain imposed by the Yildiz despotism, and vivid impressions of the convulsive change to the Young Turk regime. The narrative takes us to Jerusalem, with its turbulent Christian rivalries, and there are near views of the Balkan War of Constantinople during the Great War, and of the eventual Turkish recovery. It is all effectively written, and the description of Palestine in the chaos produced by the revolution of 1908 will stick to the memory.

IN "Renee Nere" (La Vagabonde), by Colette, attention is held by the writer's deft, sure touch, and clear etching of the characters. We are given a picture of the Paris of cafes-chantant and theatres, and there is a fascinating study of Renee herself and her fellow-artistes. This arresting work of the much-discussed French authoress is entirely free from the atmosphere that some readers of her earlier books found repellent. One admires a great deal the excellent translation of Charlotte Remfry-Kidd, and closes the book sighing a little at the glimpse of a tender and brave woman's heart.

EXCITEMENT begins in the first chapter of "Vantage Striker," by Miss Helen Simpson. Lady Sarah is injudicious enough to accompany Dermot Boyne to a Whitechapel fight, where not all the fighting is confined to the ring. We go further west and meet Cabinet Ministers, fashionable doctors, and the lords of the lawn-tennis world, among whom Dermot holds a high place. Then comes the murder of the Prime Minister and Dermot's arrest, and Dr. Springfellow's curious behaviour—and quite a lot more. This is a joyous book which is partly a comedy and partly a thriller, witty and satirical, and wholly to be recommended.

IN his new book, with characteristic ebullient wit, Mr. Nichols touches upon many matters of mirth and moment; plain truths, mordant comment, romance and a touch of fantasy combining to produce a delightful literary pot-pourri. The title of the book, though made the occasion of provocative chat anent the sex with which the dauntless modernist has had many a tilt in the past, is due to the fact that the chapters on Eve's ways and works come last in the series of sketches. The thin-skinned section of the eternal feminine, with energy and rancour, made vigorous protest against Mr. Nichols' statements, all of which the debonair young author regarded as part of the fun of the fair. Intelligent women with a sense of proportion and humour, however, will delight in his uncanny intuition and sound conclusions when he states the case for and against their follies, frailties and philosophy.

There are those who decry Mr. Nichols' ability and achievement, and look with disfavour on the brilliant young iconoclast as he huris defiance at whatever conventional gods there be that rouse him to wrath. "Toujours l'audace" is his motto, and some amusingly scathing criticisms of his elders and betters in the literary field may well be forgiven for the sake of his originality, scope, and quick and ardent sympathy with the underdog. For Mr. Nichols is a humanitarian, though probably he would be the last to admit it, and is ever on the side of the lost, stolen or strayed.

In the plainest terms he proclaims the barbarity of the hunt, and anathematizes those genial citizens who go off abroad for annual holiday, leaving the household cat to prow and starve in the gutter. And who but a lover of the blossoming earth could have written the elusive fragment "Flowers in Winter," which concerns the jasmine which flings its sprigs of

dancing yellow stars across the gloomy atmosphere, and the Christmas rose that lifts proud, pale flowerets from mud and clay.

"The Mirror" is a slight, but penetrating story of a Louis Seize mirror, with pouting Cupids linking arms amid garlands of tarnished rosebuds, the exquisite silver surface of which had reflected every secret in the life of an old-time beauty, now forced to sell this one remaining relic of days of gay romance in a sordid pawnshop in a by-street.

"The Poison of Proverbs" makes hay with irritating clichés and catchwords dating from the sapient days of Victoria the Good; and in "Some Obscure Heroes" Mr. Nichols holds a brief for the Man in the Street, for whom he protests a medal should be struck and inscribed with the words, "For Carrying On." And in a small homily on good manners he suggests that scoring over a servant, who is not permitted to answer back, is just about as gallant and amusing a feat as potting a bird in a coop.

"A Piece of Lace" is cynical and clearsighted; and "On Being Alone" an amusing sketch of a haven on the Continent, where he finds solitude divine, where no one can invite him to tea, cocktails, dinner, or wild and woolly parties, and where no one will ring the bell and ask him if he wants a vacuum cleaner or if "the men" may come in for a minute to "look at" the curtain rods!

Very candid is the writer on the subject of the woman-who-wants-to-be wooed: "Women will never realise that making love, for a man, is akin to a hunt for a wild and swift-limbed quarry, over the hills of time and through the woods of the world. It is not always that he would be hunting, there are other things; pauses to be made, dreams to be dreamed, songs to be sung. But for women there is only one thing, and the incense before her

IN "The Five Hundred Best English Letters," compiled and with an introduction by the first Earl of Birkenhead, are included extremely interesting examples of the epistolary art, written by representative men and women in past centuries. There are typical examples from the pen of famous letter-writers—Walpole, Lamb, Carlyle. We find here Lord Balfour's famous note written on behalf of the British Government to the French Ambassador in 1922. A missive from a child to "Dear Mamma" begins, "I am sorry for touching that stinking little cat." Models of brevity intrigue; for example, a typical communication from a schoolboy to his parent as follows: "S.O.S., L.S.D., R.S.V.P." Crowned heads are represented in this catholic collection, and letters from Byron and Smollett and Coleridge; the dominant feature being variety and an intimate revelation of other days and other ways.

particular star must always be burning." He will buy his wife, continues this engaging student of social affairs, a library, containing Meredith's "Love in a Valley," "Wuthering Heights," and "Old Wives' Tales," "the latter to remind her that, even if I am a brute, I am not such a brute as Sophie's husband, also George Moore's 'Eloise and Abelard' because it is the most beautiful love tale in the English language, and Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall' to give her poise and induce a feeling of superiority when she is interviewing the Cook!"

Description of a Gigolo: "His fine, fatigued profile outlined against a crazy chaos of snow-white skyscrapers; his dressing-gown from Charvet, designed in triangles of orange and black; his cigarettes imported from Benson and Hedges, his clothes from Savile Row, and his terrier from Dublin, and looking, in its cushioned basket, as though it wanted to get back."

Mr. Nichols' warm humanity keeps cropping up: "If one allows pity to enter for a brief space into one's heart, that does not align one with the characters of Tchekov, who howl if anybody offers them a five-pound note and scream with horror if they see the sun. . . . But every house, at some time or another, is Heartbreak House. Every street, at some desolate hour of night or day, is Sinister Street, and every man, however shallow he may seem, has known himself, at some turn of the clock, to be despised and rejected of men."

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