

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

IN "Sowing Glory," Major P. C. Wren has expanded into a book the memoirs of Mary Ambree, an Englishwoman who served in the French Foreign Legion, and whose father and brother, both officers in the British Army, were killed in the first months of the war, she herself driving ambulances for five years in France and Belgium.

EVEN for those not much interested in champion jumpers and intelligent horses, "Moonfisher," by Mr. Philip Macdonald, will prove highly interesting and entertaining. Nicholas Sentry, who has a way in dealing with refractory horseflesh, barters a motor-car for the mare that gives the name to the story. And a vivid and joyful story it is, racing along as fast as Moonfisher herself, and quite as successfully, and the simplicity of the story, its ups and downs, and triumphs and disasters, intrigue by reason of the delightful art of the storyteller.

MR. LIAM O'FLAHERTY is nothing if not stimulating, as those who have read his earlier books do not need to be reminded. A short review of his "Two Years" appeared in this column some little time back, and now in "I Went to Russia," he is blunt, forcible, tragic, and without fear or favour. There is much self-revelation in his latest book, combined with vividly illuminating facts concerning the country that now grips the attention of the world, all of which goes to make Mr. O'Flaherty's book a memorable one.

MRS. NAOMI MITCHISON is not everybody's novelist. Her following is of the highbrow cult, the literary elect. But their enthusiasm fades not nor fails, and her latest book will stir them to fresh enthusiasm. "The Corn Spring and the Spring Queen," a cumbersome title, tells the story of a petty State on the Black Sea Coast, where magic flourishes, and the ways and customs are brutal and barbaric. The lovely siren Erif marries the Corn King, and in order to use her magic power, plots to annihilate him, and put in his place her father. She soon grows to love Karrik, however, but the plot goes on and leads to tragedy piled upon tragedy. Sparta, Athens, Egypt, the toils and intrigues of war and peace, two centuries before Christ, are depicted with able craftsmanship, accurate knowledge, and vivid imagination. This is a novel on heroic lines, and a notable contribution to modern fiction.

Our Fortnightly Book Review

ALICE MEYNELL

By Viola Meynell

THE gifted and scholarly essayist and poet, Alice Meynell, died at dawn on November 27, 1922, in her sleep. Her daughter, Viola, has now written the biography of her brilliant mother, who has been acclaimed as one of Britain's ablest writers; and has brought to bear a competent literary style, knowledge of social and literary conditions during the past 40 years, and great love and reverence for her subject.

Alice Meynell was the daughter of a grave and studious father and beautiful, gay-hearted, gifted mother, who was greatly admired and loved by Charles Dickens; and the sister of Elizabeth Butler, whose fame as a painter of battle pictures is world wide. Growing from a happy childhood to an introspective youth, a strain of melancholy was apparent in her early poems written before the age of twenty was reached. Soon however, came her meeting with Wilfrid Meynell, eminent English journalist, who, reading one day in the "Pall Mall Gazette" a review of "Preludes" by this brilliant girl, expressed the wish to meet the author. A friend introduced him to her parents, and he and Alice corresponded for a brief period. Very soon their engagement was announced, and a few months afterward came the marriage of the gifted girl with him of whom his friend, Father Lockhart, wrote: "Chivalrous in honour, tender in piety and love, faithful to the end, and true as steel in weal or woe," and his tribute was proved to be right in the years of life together of Wilfrid and Alice Meynell.

Journalism and literary activities were their avocation and delight, and the family of happy children somewhat of an episode in the Meynell ménage, though a much beloved one. "The pencilling mama," as she was named by George Meredith, sat for hours at her work, while the band of beautiful babies scribbled in scrapbooks on the floor or edited a precocious newspaper under the table. "We were taken to her arms, but briefly; exquisitely fondled, but with economy, as if there was always work to be resumed. We were all addressed as 'Child,' our names being temporarily forgotten; but our parents had a glamour for us beyond the ordinary, our adoration of our mother being particularly persistent." Mrs. Meynell is revealed as a spiritual, shadowy, aloof personality, but the beauty and devotion of the home life of the Meynell ménage are apparent; while the book gives an excellent summary of the published essays, poems and criticisms. Also are included extracts from Mrs. Meynell's letters during her tour in America, in which she is discovered as primarily wife and mother, though filling important role of wage-earner through lectures and countless contributions to important periodicals. Apart from travel, recreation for Mrs. Meynell was apparently not easily come by. Never a great reader of novels, biography she liked, and for relaxation preferred the books of O. Henry and W. W. Jacobs, which she read and read again. A curious choice, one reflects, for that deliberate, highly sensitive, and cultivated artist.

Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore assisted in the two papers edited by the Meynells, and in many others of their multifarious literary activities. Between Coventry Patmore and the poetess a happy and enduring friendship existed. To him Mrs. Meynell wrote: "I have never told you what I think of your poetry. It is the greatest thing in the world, the most harrowing and the sweetest. I can hardly realise that the author is so celestially kind to me and calls me friend." To her father, says the biographer, Francis Thompson stood for achievement to such a mighty degree that such failures as made the poet himself despair did not exist for him. All the world knows how Wilfrid Meynell and his sweet wife befriended the derelict genius who, wandering London streets in last stages of raggedness and destitution, put a packet of MSS. into the post office, for "Merry England," edited by the Meynells. His poems were printed, and a meeting ensued between the tragic author of "To a Snowflake" and Wilfrid Meynell, the discriminating literateur and faithful friend, which resulted in a lifelong alliance.

Through the pages drift figures of enthralling interest: Ruskin, Henley (Viking Chief of letters, worshipped by the intellectual flower of young England on the other side of idolatry), Meredith, Max Beerbohm. The last-named wrote in good-natured protest: "In a few years' time Mrs. Meynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English Sabbath. Between

MR. RICHARD WARD, in his first novel, "The Compelled Hero," tells us of the ultra-modern smart and youthful intelligentsia of France's gay capital city. In this somewhat depressing tale the author proves himself as possessed of a pretty wit and a ready pen. It is a slight story this that tells of a young composer of music and his disappointing love-story and speedy disillusionment; but the manner of telling, and the extraordinary loveliness of some descriptive passages, lead us to look for future work of this young writer.

FROM first to last a great deal has been written about Queen Christina of Sweden, who succeeded her father, Gustavus Adolphus, almost exactly three centuries ago, though she was not crowned "King" till 1650; but few books about her are as bright as Mrs. Compton Mackenzie's volume entitled "The Sibyl of the North: The Tale of Christina, Queen of Sweden." The book is dedicated to Axel Munthe, author of that wonderful compound of romance, tragedy, and sheer beauty entitled "The Story of San Michele," which only recently came my way. Mrs. Mackenzie, in her book on the Swedish Queen, has concentrated upon a career more extraordinary than any of those depicted in the novels of her brilliant husband.

her and Mr. Coventry Patmore the shuttlecock of praise has flashed incessantly, and now hark! the infrequent voice of Mr. George Meredith is raised in her honour."

George Meredith paid homage to Mrs. Meynell in spoken and written word and constant tribute: "Heavy double white violets, unforgettably beautiful, he grew for my mother in a frame, to remind her of Genoa; white strawberries came to us from his garden too. An iris he loved, with pale blue petals and a golden heart, he named Alicia Coerulea and kept her supplied with it."

Mrs. Meynell's later years were saddened by the Great War, which desperately wounded that sensitive spirit. Many of her most notable poems are quoted, but not the one dedicated to her husband, which first won my own love for her work:—

*Home, home from the horizon far and clear,
Hither the soft wings sweep;
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near
The dove-cote doors of sleep.
Oh, which are they that come through sweetest light
Of all those homing birds?
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?
Your words to me, your words!*