

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

STILL another book concerning the Great Egyptian. In "Cleopatra: A Royal Voluptuary," Oscar von Wertheimer, gives the facts of her life, character and amours so far as they are known, with a praiseworthy attempt to be impartial. "As her genius was beyond question, people tried to blast her reputation," we are told. She was perhaps no worse than her forbears, but it is part of Wertheimer's case that she was intellectually far superior to them or any of her contemporaries. She was in her teens when she became Caesar's lover, "slim and supple, with a long thin face, soft symmetrical features, a somewhat Semitic nose, fine sensual mouth, wonderfully large eyes and abundant hair; while race and regal majesty characterised her every movement." Widely cultured, too; it would seem, and thus qualified to impress the massive intellect of Caesar as well as subdue his heart, though he was too great to be her helpless victim, as Mark Antony was. An interesting contribution to the literature on a fascinating figure of tragedy.

MR. JOSEPH THORP—so widely known as "T" of "Punch"—has written his autobiography under the title "Friends and Adventures." The author has had experiences as a Jesuit, commercial traveller, typographer, advertising consultant, journalist, and it was he who started the Agenda Club. His publisher, Mr. Cape, describes it as the "apologia of an impenitently 'unsuccessful' man."

PRINCESS PETER WOLKONSKY'S book, "The Way of Bitterness: Soviet Russia, 1920," tells a moving tale of love and privation and heroism. It relates how its author succeeded in rescuing her husband from imprisonment by the Soviet. To this end she endured great weariness and humiliation, tramping through the darkness of night the forty-two versts between Gatchina and Petrograd, and subsisting, during a protracted period of negotiation, on a minimum of food. That she in the end prevailed was due, over and above her tireless persistency, to a literary association. An earlier Princess of the same name had followed her husband to exile in Siberia. This devotion inspired a poem, and when Dzerzhinsky's attention was called to it, and its modern parallel, he relented, and the Prince, who had been arrested without reason or explanation, was permitted to withdraw with his wife to Esthonia and freedom.

Prize Poem Competition

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to E. H. Smith for "To a Skylark," a poetic rhapsody peculiarly applicable to Bird Mouth. The entries during the past fortnight were of high average merit, specially selected for commendation being "Alpha's" two contributions, one of which we reserve for further consideration.

"Karakia": Your haunting poem impresses by virtue of originality and sustained effect.

"Caesar"—sends a word-picture, modern in treatment, the delightful phraseology producing cameo-like impression.

S.E.J.: Unusual facility is apparent in your verses, which are successful enough in a lifting fashion, but do not rise above the commonplace. We do not admire the contraction of "violets" to "vi'lets."

"Merrie": "Spring" is a gay, sweet poem, in which intelligent and eager appreciation of beauty find expression in very charming verse form.

S. MacG.: The poem beginning "Ah, who so gay
As a bird in May?"

is interesting and original work.

"Paolo" invests a slender theme with a Celtic quality of wistful dreams.

"Ajax": Prolix and ponderous.

Orcus: Why so dull and dismal?

Communist: Alas! those lines!

Pauline: Writing tragic poetry, it would seem, is not your metier.

Sons o' Guns: Not this time.

THE talent of Mr. Eric Gill is very varied, for he is not only a sculptor, wood-engraver, and designer in general, but he also writes well. His most recent book is called "Clothes," which he discusses as houses, workshops, churches, and town halls. Then follow chapters dealing with the Tyranny of Tailors, Dignity of Decency, Nature and Nakedness, while the book closes with an epilogue on Trousers—truly intriguing titles.

"SHALLOW WATER" is a good title for Miss Theodora Benson's new book. It can hardly be called a novel, though a tiny romance runs through its light and airy pages. It is rather a series of little dialogues, more or less on the lines of those earlier dialogues by Anthony Hope that some of us found so delightful in long-past days. This is a jolly little book, and may be recommended for light, very light, entertainment.

IN "Rousseau," Mr. C. E. Vulliamy has produced a valuable and interesting study of that perplexing genius, Jean Jacques Rousseau. To read this book is to know Rousseau; and to know Rousseau is to become acquainted with the most amazing bundle of confounding opposites ever brought together under the same epidermis. Of his genius there is no need to speak. In his books he will remain, for many a generation to come, a living influence for good and evil in the minds of men. We are given a portrait in Mr. Vulliamy's biography of an amazing bundle of human opposites, of one who was neither a liar nor an honest man, neither a coward nor a hero, neither a cad nor a gentleman; he was all of them at once, and staggered through life as if he had been tied to the tail of an invisible balloon.

IN "Playing for England," by Jack Hobbs, all who love cricket will find much to delight them in Jack Hobbs's own account of his experience in Test matches. He played against Australia more than 21 years ago, and has gone to the wickets first for England in nearly all the great matches ever since. Easily the best batsman of his time, everybody knows how he has passed the record of W. G. Grace, the cricket hero of the preceding generation. And he is the only professional who has captained England against Australia. His own story is characteristic of the man in its modesty, its generous appreciation of colleagues, and its recognition of the good qualities of the other side. These traits are of the essence of good sportsmanship.

... To A Skylark ...

Light as a leaflet fanned by Zephyr's wing,
Thou wend'st thy fluttering way to realms on high,
Where in the boundless blue thou lov'st to sing,
The peerless prima donna of the sky.
Shy Philomel pours forth her rhapsody,
Sheltered beneath the purple cloud of night;
But thou art borne on waves of ecstasy,
Enveloped in a dazzling robe of light.
A vein of sadness very close to tears
Runs through the nightingale's rich melody,
Leading to solemn thoughts of bygone years,
Like some grave nocturne in a minor key.
But thou, whilst singing on thy heavenward way,
Breath'st nought but joy of life in thy refrain.
We hear thee on a perfect summer's day
And live through all the happy years again.
The children in their pastime pause awhile
To watch thee vanish from their upturned gaze;
Even old age with reminiscent smile,
Hearing thy voice, forgets declining days.

—F. H. Smith, Waimata Valley.