

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Jottings

IN perusing "King Crime," by Mr. Collinson Owen, it is constantly necessary for the reader to assure himself that he is not scanning the pages of Edgar Allen Poe, Gaboriau, or Edgar Wallace—if, indeed, these purveyors of horrific fiction, even in their most balefully inventive moments, imagined anything comparable to Mr. Owen's all too truthful record. Never in the history of civilisation has anything been known like the absolute subversion of law and order, the complete triumph of criminality over justice and social decency, which is the actual condition of the great cities of the United States. The "Saturday Evening Post" declares that "the protection of the law is steadily shifting from the citizen to the crook." With such guarantee of the truth of conditions depicted, the reader of Mr. Owen's vivid pages may accept this almost incredible volume as a sober record of actual and indubitable fact. "King Crime" will occupy an enduring place in the sociological literature of the twentieth century.

WHATEVER one may think of the validity of the doctrine of relativity, it is certain that no physicist or mathematician has imposed his name on the rank and file of his contemporaries as has Dr. Einstein. The reason of this is explained in "Albert Einstein: A Biographical Portrait," by Anton Reiser, who decides that Einstein is the complete human being in his ability, learning, and very wide interests. It was while working in the Patent Office at Berne in 1905 that he made what his biographer calls the "revolutionary discovery" which has brought him fame. He is not only a man of science, but also a publicist, with an ever-increasing interest in his race, and he adores music, playing the violin and the piano well, in striking contrast to Darwin, who ultimately lost his power of listening at all.

THE Man with Two Mirrors" tells of what goes on in the "antique" trade. As was to be expected from a practised dramatist, Mr. Knoblock presents a plot that is cunningly contrived against a picturesque and ever-changing background. It is the story of Benjamin Smith, half Greek and half English, whose adventures begin in the servants' hall of a London house and end on a more fashionable storey. For Ben gets on in the world, though he has to fight hard for his place in the sun, and it is some time before he finds himself, and meantime he marries the wrong woman. However, the unpleasant Zoe leaves him and bigamously marries another, and Ben goes into partnership with the curious Carradine. There is much exciting incident, and, moreover, a touch of melodrama, which is not unattractive, the whole canvas being painted in vivid strokes.

## Mary Webb A Short Study of Her Life and Work

By Hilda Addison

MISS ADDISON has done her work well. Deeply conscious of the literary beauty and intense spirituality of Mary Webb's work, her summing up of her artistic achievement is comprehensive, concise and analytical, giving the salient points of different facets of that genius who was "half in faerie and half out." A comparatively short book, it yet tells much of what we desire to know, both in critical estimate of Mrs. Webb's place in the world of letters, and appraisal of the nobility and unselfishness of her deeply religious and somewhat austere personality. A strong character, yet with feminine inconsistencies, sympathetic to all grades of consciousness, but at times obstinate to a degree; enamoured of her beloved Shropshire, its peasants and its garrulity, its ways and its works, and depicting the inhabitants, so her biographer asserts, more ably than Hardy does his Wessex natives.

Brought up in a simple and pious atmosphere, Mary Webb imbibed a love of whatsoever things are good and holy, and early showed a passion for the miracle of nature's beauty. Marrying young, for a time she lived in London, but her spirit never accustomed itself to the great city, but ever hovered in love and mystical imagining over beloved Shropshire downs; and after a time she returned to her native soil, to become absorbed in nature, and forge close ties of sympathy and understanding with the sons and daughters of the soil, those labouring peasants whom she loved, which were never strained or broken throughout her lifetime.

Generosity was an outstanding quality, and no beggar left her empty-handed. Disappointment and ingratitude she met, but nothing deterred her zeal for humanity, and proverbial was her kindness to an endless stream of down-and-outs who haunted the hospitable "Spring Cottage."

Mary Webb's sense of the mystic, another worldness and great realisation of a great Presence always near earth's beauty, was with her from her youth up. Early she came under the influence of Julian of Norwich, and Julian's meditations upon the immanence of a great God found quick response in a mind attuned with infinite beauty and love.

Of Mrs. Webb's literary style the author has great appreciation and no criticism. She touches in separate chapters on its fictional value, spiritual sense, humour and poetic quality. "Precious Bane" she finds a book of noble beauty, a pre-eminent achievement of genius, and in this verdict many will agree. Who, having read them, can forget the many lovely passages, and the delightful Prudence, with her disfigured beauty, lovely soul, quaint phraseology and Dear Acquaintance? An incomparable picture of rural life, and of the strength of a spiritual union which eventually overrides lure of the flesh, though that too is a very important factor in life near the soil, as visualised by Mrs. Webb.

Her later life was spent far from the metropolis, in whose teeming streets, poverty, squalor and hopelessness, she lost heart and her sensitive soul felt seared. Moreover, the intelligentsia, in whose circle for a time she moved, did not understand her nor she them; although there were one or two exceptions, among them Walter de la Mare, between whom and Mrs. Webb there arose a deep and abiding affectionate comprehension.

Shrinking from criticism and comment, fate was unkind in bestowing a frail body and restless nerves on this woman of genius, and she suffered for many years from the unhappy illness known as Graves Disease. But her invincible courage rose triumphant against the slings and arrows of malignant fortune, she made gallant struggle against frailty and suffering, concentrated on that series of great novels, and small collection of haunting verse that she has bequeathed to the race she loved. To the last remained with her unquenchable ardour for the lovely sights and sounds of the green world of nature, and an acute and listening ear to the soft, sad music of humanity. In October of 1927 she died of pernicious anaemia. Remote from the town, her last resting-place is in Shrewsbury, within sight of the distant hills, and larches that climb high "among the stars aslant." Across her grave swings a lime-tree's loveliness.

*Under a blossoming tree  
Let me lie down,  
With one blackbird to sing to me  
In the evenings brown  
Low in the grass, deep in the daisies,  
I shall sleep sound, safe from their blames and  
praises."*

"RED IKE," by Mr. J. M. Denwood and Mr. Fowler Wright, which is the English Book Society's latest choice, is an exciting tale of Cumberland poachers and gypsies. The real feeling for the rough countryside is apparent in this tale of the fells, and Ike himself, besides being a poacher, is also a poet. An excellent story of its kind, though its rough customers certainly do seem over-careful of their grammar and their language at times is of the stilted variety. Nevertheless there is plenty of action, and some thrilling episodes.

"THE Lustre Jug" is a thriller, but of an unusual kind. Here there is no mysterious murder and no detective. Nobody, in fact, is killed until the last chapter, though there justice is done in the most satisfactory, if unexpected, way. On the other hand, Mr. Hird has a finely dramatic story to tell about a woman whose one overpowering ambition to become "a lady" leads her into the darkest and foulest corners. There may not be many Mrs. Stradmores about, but they certainly exist.

THE year of our Lord 1848 was a turning point in the development of girls' education in England, and so, it may be, in the history of the world." This is the opening sentence of Miss Steadman's biography of Dorothea Beale, who raised Cheltenham Ladies' College from its shaky, audacious-timorous beginnings to the position of an English Public School for girls, not unworthy of consorting with the Public Schools that made their brothers. In 1848 a college for women students was opened in London, and christened Queen's College, and among its first students was Dorothea Beale. Five years later four gentlemen of Cheltenham met to consider a scheme for a girls' school in their own town, "the proposed course of studies to embrace instruction in Holy Scripture and the Liturgy of the Church of England, the principles of Grammar, Geography, History, Arithmetic, French, Music, Drawing, and Needlework." German, Italian and Dancing were "extras." It is pleasant to learn that when the school was opened the children brought their dogs with them, and "eight of these settled their private differences in a free fight in the dressing-room." To this school, after its somewhat unsuccessful start, came Miss Dorothea Beale, in 1858, aged thirty-seven. She remained at its head until her death in 1906. It was only a fortnight after she had given her last lesson in college that she died. This biography, if rather too profuse in school details to hold the interest of those who have no connection with Cheltenham, was finished, approximately, on the centenary of Miss Beale's birth. It is a careful, pious, thorough piece of work, showing Miss Beale as she appeared to one who was first her pupil and later a member of her staff.