

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

"MY Life Story: From Archduke to Grocer," is the arresting title of what with truth may be termed a human document, the author of which is Leopold Wolfing (ex-Archduke Leopold of Tuscany). From the first sentence, "I take up my pen with the painful suspicion that in the eyes of the world I rank as one of Europe's bad boys" to the last, "Down and out though I may be, I am seldom downcast: I still travel, singing," our attention is riveted on the good and ill-fortune, mostly the latter, of this scion of the house of Hapsburg.

A democrat from youth up, the Archduke passed a Bohemian existence in Berlin, Paris, and the Riviera, experimented for a short space with colony of back-to-nature cranks, married twice (each time unhappily), for a time acted as salesman in a clothier's shop, sawked sausages in Berlin, and at long last, when fifty years of age, ran a grocery business in Vienna. "To be a successful grocer," says the Royal writer with engaging naïvete, "one must have brains, and—I can only speak from my own first-hand observation—brains are a commodity which few Royal personages possess. I myself was never more conscious of my lack when, after I had slaved away as a small grocer for nearly a year in Vienna, my creditors swooped down on me and I had to put up shop."

In this extraordinarily interesting volume there are vivid pen pictures of Continental royalties who figured in world history during past couple of decades. Frank, vivacious, transparently sincere, and without a trace of mauvaise honte, the chronicler gives away intimate secrets of the court circle of which he was a member and habitué before he cast off for ever the trammels of its hidebound regulations. Without fear or favour are limned the portraits of that tragic pair, the ill-fated Archduke Francis Ferdinand and Sophie, his consort; also the Emperor Francis Joseph (with whom the youthful democrat was far from popular), and his only son, the unhappy Crown Prince Rudolf. We are given unvarnished statements anent army and navy, unfair treatment in each of these services, and consequent marriage of the Royal raconteur to the fatally incompatible Johanna, from which indiscretion ensued banishment from the Emperor's entourage.

An exile, he wandered many cities of the world, usually in dire financial straits, meeting the strange bedfellows that poverty brings, and like the veriest guttersnipe, scraping a living in mean streets. In Berlin one day casually he makes the acquaintance of the beautiful Claire; and the episode of his sad and bad.

Prize Poem Competition

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to M. Lynn Gurney for the fascinating "Frosty Morning," with its vivid realisation of cleavage between straight path of duty and delights of nature's primrose path of dalliance. The work of "Caesar" and "Ginger" is selected for special commendation, the efforts of both these contributors, apart as the poles in subject and treatment, being interesting and skilful, and only second in merit to that of the prize-winner.

"Morning Song" is altogether too slight for critical comment.

"Alpha": Sorry, lack of space precludes publication of earlier poem held for consideration.

"Balm" gives evidence of poetic vision and skill in technique.

"Merrie": Creditable work in the sonnet form, central idea being woven into compact expression that keeps within broad rules of literary model selected. Perhaps the most finished work that has yet reached us from this contributor.

R.S.R.: We are at one with you in love of that enchanted isle; but, despite rhyming facility and clear-cut phraseology, your verses are lacking in the elusive quality that is an essential factor in poetry.

"Bill Sikes" sends lusty lines anent setting forth of "Nautilus" on questing adventure, but he is over-colloquial and anyhow exceeds the allotted limit of 24 lines.

J.McC. sings of the spring that is to be with spiritual fervour and some sweetness.

"Wild Rose," as ever, emphasises delight in the lovely world in verses that have an ingenuous appeal, "Spring Magic" in our opinion being adapted to a musical setting.

"Around New Zealand" is a conscientious catalogue of out-of-door sights and sounds in easily-flowing but undistinguished lines.

"Pierre": Bumble and burble, all ending in nothing.

"Smart Alec": We offer a negative to all your affirmatives.

"Nanchen": No, no, Nanette.

Frosty Morning

*I must go in and work!
Though the wind calls like an Ave sung,
And the day rises in a fan-spread flame,
Moonstone and opal and amethyst;
And the trees are diamond hung and shot with pearl . . .
Though the plains fling frosted grass to the ranges,
And the sharp wind blows.*

*I must go in and work!
Though the day breaks in enchantment
And the careless sky is filled with little twisted clouds . . .
The cold, blue river stirs.
The scented water throws its fragrance to the waiting gorse,
Though the haloed willows hold a haunting loveliness,
And their mystic shadows beckon.*

*I must go in and work!
But my heart is with the sharp wind where it blows.*

—M. Lynn Gurney.

friendship with this young working girl, her selfless devotion, gaiety, and spiritual appeal, makes a fragrant memory amid much that is tragic and sad and bad.

Assuredly this "lower true tale" proves anew the platitude that a life history, candidly revealed, is infinitely more fascinating than the wildest sweep of imagination.

IN "Dark Bridwell" a bully and a wastrel removes his household to some lonely hills and valleys in the United States, the better to enable Charles Bridwell to live the life of a loafer and a coward. He beats his children, quaffs the good red wine, and is happy in his own wild way. The time comes, however, when his peace is shattered, and his dreams, such as they are, go down the wind. Forsaken by his children, his wife's love turned to revulsion, the climax is reached when a younger son returns and tries to murder him. Nothing very new in this plot, perhaps, but the story is told with much intriguing embellishment, and all the characters, good and bad, are alive to their finger-tips. There are plenty of thrills in the story, which is to be recommended to those who like excitement in fiction if not in fact.

IT is not necessary to get annoyed over any remarks of General Pershing in "My Experiences in the World War," which seem to belittle the part played in the final victory by the British and the French. It is much better to cite the facts. The Army that broke the Hindenburg line needs no apology for its morale. The object of the general, of course, is to emphasise how vital was the assistance of his countrymen, and he does go so far as to say: "There is credit for all of us in the final triumph of our united arms. The struggle of the Allies was much longer, their sacrifices much greater than ours." Perhaps when he comes to revise his book he will keep in front of him the official map of the Front in the last months of the war. He will then be reminded of where the strain was greatest and will rewrite some of his sentences.

IN "Blue Ghost"—an intriguing title and curiously apposite—Miss Jean Temple writes of that restless genius, Lafcadio Hearn. An elusive and fugitive personality, from his birth on a Greek island and childhood in Dublin, to death in Japan and burial in a Buddhist cemetery—his was a life full of strange exotic whims and brilliant fantasy, and far too erratic to abide with success amid Western civilisation. He was given the post of lecturer in English literature in the Imperial University at Tokyo, married a Japanese wife and became a Japanese citizen. But these bald facts convey no idea of the fascination of his books; their wide range of imagery, their quality of exotic beauty, and the genius that informed his literary ways and works.