

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

IN a letter to the editor of this page, W.H. speaks of it in appreciative terms. Coming from a musician and writer, his tribute is most welcome. During the past six months he has been a prize-winner in this section of the paper, and mentions that, though over 70 years of age, until last year he had written no poetry. While playing his violin one day, however, inspiration came to him for a sonnet on Tartini, the discoverer of the third note in music. The result was an ably-written and exceedingly delightful sonnet, which we have been privileged to peruse. This, with several others, he offered to a noted English journal, the fine literary character of which has long been established, and three out of four were accepted. In conclusion the writer says: "I think your fortnightly competition an excellent institution, and admire the ingenuity of your criticisms and the kindly spirit which actuates them." He adds the interesting comment that, had he been a subscriber to the "Record" at the time of forwarding his poems to England, he would have preferred submitting to this paper one of them with a typically New Zealand theme, as he would have liked better for it to appear in a New Zealand journal, even though receiving for it less remuneration. We appreciate the compliment and applaud the patriotism.

IN "Troublous Times" Captain Brun, of the Danish R.F.A., describes his personal experiences in Russia during and after the Revolution. He was in Petrograd when the Kerensky Government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks. Representing the Danish Government, he went to Turkestan to watch the interests of Austrian and Hungarian prisoners. There he was in continual peril of his life, was arrested, and thrust into gaol, and got out of the country with difficulty eighteen months later. His letters to his wife, now printed, give a vivid account of the early period of the Revolution when life was cheapest and law mostly disregarded.

TWO years ago "Colette," published "La Seconde," and this delicate trifle now appears in an English dress, very faithfully copied from the original by Miss Viola Garvin. "Fanny and Jane" has all the charm and all the unexpectedness of the best of its predecessors. You think you will never quite understand the few people who stroll through it, and at the end it is as though you had lived with them all your life. There is Faron, a successful dramatist, his wife Fanny—and Jane, his secretary, and later his mistress. This is a wise and witty book, and short enough to be read through at a sitting.

Our Fortnightly Book Review

DOWN THE SKY

By E. V. Lucas

THOSE who read "Windfall's Eve," and rejoiced in its wit, humour and tenderness, will like to renew acquaintance with the chivalrous Richard, his innamorata the attractive Jenny, Posy Crystal and her errant fiancé. These appear again and their doings are chronicled with freshness and charm in "Down the Sky," the apt and arresting title of Mr. E. V. Lucas's latest contribution to belles lettres. By no means attaining the stature of a novel, and not altogether in essay form, but something of both, the slim volume is rather a running commentary of life in England and the Continent, with many fascinating digressions in the true Lucasian manner.

My own acquaintance with Mr. Lucas in lighter vein began—how many years ago?—with "Listener's Lure," which an elderly friend presented as suitable for budding intellectual curiosity. And very delightful I found its agreeable wit, sure touch, and gay acceptance of life's little ironies, coupled with that vein of romance which this author is an adept at suggesting rather than describing. Since then allegiance has not wavered, though suffering occasional diminution by reason of worship of diverse literary idols pursued with youth's fanatical enthusiasm. And now it is certain that those going "down the sky," surveying sunset rather than morning radiance on life's highway, will find renewed delight in Mr. Lucas's wise humour, nonchalant savoir faire, and subtle, effective handling of blagueur and poseur in the social cosmos.

From the beginning, when the winner of the Windfall sweep discourages desire of the casual and provocative Mrs. Candover to start a restaurant, our interest is intrigued. "It is extremely improbable," I said to Jenny, "that you will ever be mixed up with an absurd shop called 'The Chicken Pie.' Personally I would prefer another kind of place—a cosy little affair, to be christened 'The Old Flames,' where friends of mature years could loiter, with screens round all the tables. Not in the least a place for the young; no music; no dancing; a total absence of the Little Brothers of the Ritz and their precocious girl friends wreathed in smoke." Later we have the comments of the sporting spinster who really did start a luncheon room: "If you want to retain any respect for your fellow-creatures, don't run a restaurant. There are a few nice people who behave themselves and get on with it, but others are holy terrors. Eating four sandwiches, and only paying for three, has become a new industry. And there was a woman who insisted I should open an oyster bar. 'If you'd do that,' said she, 'I'd buy half a dozen every second Thursday on my way to Bridge!'"

Concerning the joys of motoring in England, which he knows and loves so well, the author tells delightful tales of Kent and Sussex and Surrey, with descriptions of those old inns the charms of which have had their loving scribes from Hazlitt onward. Of mine host at one of these happy havens we are told: "He was a retired music-hall singer, and his steady tipple was gin and water. His opinion was there never had been, never would be anyone like Dan Leno. 'Lots of us could be funny, but he was fun himself. Poor Dan, he had to pay for it, as they tell me genius always must.' And by way of contrast there is an encounter with an old clergyman, very desolate and lonely because of the recent death of his wife, but able to smile over a letter of condolence received from a young man, formerly a member of his flock: "I was grieved to hear of the death of your wife. I can hardly be said to know her as well as you did, as I only met her twice, but I have recently lost my own great-grandmother and thus can enter into your feelings."

On matrimony Mr. Lucas, by his protagonist the delightful Richard, remarks: "The divorce laws are so busy worrying about infidelity that they take no account of the real snags in the stream of matrimony. Infidelity, before it is discovered, can run concurrently with assiduous attention and solicitude, but other impediments to sympathy and good fellowship obtrude themselves and are ceaselessly exasperating. Two friends of mine parted because of the opening or shutting of windows. Too many women have a deplorable passion for fresh air, and this one's desire amounted to mania. The husband has now returned to his air-tight London flat, and the wife to a house in the country where such visitors as have the hardihood to

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY Virginia is a good background for romance, and in "Gideon's Lady," by G. Kent Oliver, the author has missed none of his opportunities. Gideon Hawkins, who left the plough in Devon to make his fortune in the New World, was a very rough diamond, and Anne Wilding, the exquisite daughter of a strolling player, was a very unsuitable wife for a pioneer planter. Gideon marries her, not for her pretty ways, but for the 50 acres of land that were her portion. The winning of Gideon and the wooing of Anne, the troubles that beset her and the devotion of the gentlemanly "felon" are features of this excellent story. A first novel, one imagines, and one of definite achievement.

"To That First Naked Glory," by Mr. Lawrence David, is what may be termed a rattling good yarn, full of unusual excitements. Young Pierre Vande succeeds to the island of Manora, and, like a true blue republican, believes in the divine right of kings. He is a born leader of men, and is familiar with the private history of Louis XIV, and makes a most successful attempt to emulate it. In this he is aided by his cockney valet, and by the stupid behaviour of those formerly in power. He is a magnificent modern, almost too good to be true, but most attractively limned. This is a picturesque and highly-entertaining romance.

MISS HELEN WADDELL has translated "Manon Lescaut" from the original French text (1731) of l'Abbe Prevost. Miss Waddell has done her work well in her version of one of the marvels of literature, which is, as Mr. George Saintsbury says in his introduction, "a thing that is completely complete and perfectly perfect." There is nothing to be added to all that has already been said and written about this sad and beautifully told love story, but there is much to be told about the interesting and unfortunate personality of its author, and both Mr. Saintsbury and Miss Waddell shed a great deal of light on the many facets of character of this intriguing litterateur.

stay with her sit all day in their top-coats."

We find the same lightness of touch, felicity of expression and acuteness of observation whether the author discourses on a visit to a poultry farm in England or a tea plantation in the East; a passing contact with a stranger in a train, or an interlude with a tipsy cousin in Colombo, who insists on regarding him as a "drummer" in the rubber trade. A versatile and vivacious chronicler.