

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

Prize Poem Competition

FOLLOWING on unprecedented success of his "Story of San Michele," Dr. Alex Munthe has reprinted a collection of short essays and sketches entitled "Memories and Vagaries." In the new preface he has added to the original volume Dr. Munthe says that these commentaries were written in the dim past when the writer had small experience, but he hopes there exists a minority of book-lovers who still find delight in spontaneous writing, and perchance may approve of these impulsive annotations of headlong immaturity.

There is no need for apology, for here we read much that is delightful and much that is poignant. Admirers of this author do not need to be reminded of his fascinating literary methods, very apparent in these sketches and stories of his youth. We meet again some old friends: sweet Sister Philomené, guardian angel of Salle St. Claire; the sad Salvatores; and the selfless street scavenger Zusco, who in his poverty and rags is one of the spiritual elect. And Gaetano, street musician, his poor little monkey, and precious barrel-organ: "It is well known that this instrument, like the violin, gets a fuller and more sympathetic tone the older it is. This aged artist had an excellent one, not of the modern noisy kind, but a melancholy and old-fashioned type which knew how to lend a dreamy mystery to the gayest allegretto, and in whose proudest tempo di Marcia there sounded an undertone of resignation." Then there is lovely Raffaella, an artist's model to her eternal woe, who is described as "butterfly-winged Psyche, whose lips Eros has not yet kissed."

A lover of all dumb creatures, of whom he writes with an infinite sympathy, Dr. Munthe voices the feeling of raging protest that surges in many hearts on looking at forest creatures held in hopeless captivity for the delectation and amusement of thoughtless men who prod them with umbrellas and feed them with buns. A book to add to your library list.

IN the amusing satire, "Yashima" makes hay of provincial society. A youthful Arabian beauty, affianced to a princeling of her own race, turns yearning glances toward the Western world and its customs. England is her Mecca, and thither she wends on a voyage of discovery. Her subsequent social adventures and misadventures in a provincial town and among the Bright Youth of London gives the author an opportunity for much amusing satire on English ways and works. This is a book of most entertaining quality, and will delight many readers.

CONDITIONS:—Any reader of the "Radio Record" is eligible to send entries for the fortnightly Poem Competition as frequently as desired, but the prize of half a guinea will not be awarded to the same contributor twice in succession. The poems sent may be of any length not exceeding 25 lines, and must be the original work of the competitor. Name and address must accompany nom de plume, and if return of MSS. is requested, stamps must be enclosed. All care taken but no responsibility. The decision of the judge is final.

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to "Karakia" for able treatment of unusual subject, considerable success being achieved in difficult verse form and topic far removed from the superficial and pretty-pretty. Selected for special commendation is a delightful effort by "Ginger," entitled "September Rain," for which we regret lack of room precludes publication.

"Mountain Courage": Inadequate treatment of a great subject.

"Alpha's" work invariably shows consistency of merit and acquaintance with literary technique, the pathos of a pohutukawa tree in an alien atmosphere being presented with imaginative beauty.

"Thur" sends a small, lovely impression of the swiftness and glamour of the morning of life.

"Regret": A love poem, quite free from mawkishness, which evolves wistful underlying note of sadness with sure touch on the heartstrings.

Vladimir: Your plodding Pegasus, we fear, will leave you in the lurch.

"Lucibel Lee" sends two slight poems anent golden trees and birds of sapphire hue, "Kowhai Tree" possessing some measure of attractiveness.

"Chris": Thanks for welcome note of appreciation. Several favourable comments have been made on "Maid Morning."

"Firefly" is sweetly sad and sadly sweet for far too many uninspired verses.

"Xanadu": Phrasology picturesque, but sonnet crashes at its close.

"Vulcan": Logic bad, rhyming worse.

"Romeo": Certainly not.

... Sawdust ...

An odour dear to me is that of brown
Wood shavings purling in a twisted stream
From out the smoothing plane, like waves, that down
A yellow beach topple and fall. The cream
Of sawdust, too, is good. And reeking glue
In iron pots. And lumps of timber smoothed
After the plane. The plane itself, and blue
Keen-bladed chisels. And a saw, sharp-toothed,
That whines long, like the wind that cries
When all the ground is cold and white with hail.
And rich red varnish. Oil that glossy lies
All round the scarred wood bench, and leaves a trail
To dry. And paint that tangs of linseed oil;
And the strong effort of a man at toil.

—"Karakia."

THE American Civil War of the 'sixties, as seen through Southern eyes, and its effects upon a typical family of the time, are the keynotes of "The Forge," by Mr. T. S. Stripling, the author of several notable novels. The Valdens lived in Alabama—a large and casual family. Old Jimmie is an ex-blacksmith with an almost biblical number of sons and daughters. He is hot-tempered, but no tyrant. Fairly prosperous, it seemed likely the next generation would carry the family to greater social height, and a son or daughter marry an aristocrat. But Fort Sumter fell and the Valden boys enlist, and a Northern army came South to burn the Valden property, and incredibly the niggers found themselves freed. It is a picturesque panorama. The women are delightful—Cassandra, who plays schoolmistress to

the family, Marcia, who cannot make up her mind, Gracie the quadroon, and old Mrs. Valden herself. A book to be recommended.

"RIVERS OF DAMASCUS" contains eleven short stories by the late Donn Byrne. They cover a wide range of subject. American "graft" finds a place, so does Irish whimsicality. The author finds drama on a golf links and romance on the high seas. He has a pathetic study of a negro jockey unwise enough to leave America for the Riviera, and a queer study of an Irish Republican "general" with an almost invisible division. There is a charming story of an Irish-American detective who accepts bribes in order to keep his beloved Colleen Rae in luxury, and a very terrible story of a valet who shoots his master. The friends of this brilliant Irish author, so lamentably cut off in his prime, will delight in this collection.

MR. MONTAGU SLATER, the author of "The Second City," has an uncommon gift for effective satire. The story he tells hinges on police court proceedings against a boy who is employed as a bookmaker's messenger. The case would have been disposed of summarily and without fuss had not a local member of Parliament interfered and, with the best of intentions, stirred up a scandal which involved many influential people. The motives and action of the story are logically constructed, and "The Second City" is an acceptable thriller.

IS there anyone so important and interesting that the public desires his autobiography in four large volumes? Mr. Theodore Dreiser, with the ruthless thoroughness of his Teutonic ancestry, evidently thinks there is, but his readers are conscious of the overwhelming egotism at the back of his colossal effort. "Dawn," in which the American novelist describes his boyhood and youth, is to be followed by further instalments. In its amplitude of detail, this first part of the autobiography will prove more than enough for most people. Several small towns of the Middle West, and eventually Chicago, witnessed Mr. Dreiser's approach to manhood, and he narrates various moral lapses with painstaking prolixity, there being no limits to his passion for self-revelation. He tells us how he sounded depths of depravity in his teens, offering no resistance to temptation, and seemingly unreprieved by conscience. This is a pathological study, and will not interest, one imagines, the average healthy-minded citizen.