

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

MISS V. SACKVILLE-WEST, one of the most charming and accomplished of our younger writers, whose 1930 novel, "The Edwardians," was widely acclaimed for its accurate psychology and skilful craftsmanship, has achieved in "All Passion Spent" a further success in an entirely different genre. This is a study, wise, witty, balanced and beautiful, of old age and its reactions to past and present conditions.

The central figure, Lady Slane, through much of her long life of 90 years has lived in social limelight, and high honours have been heaped upon her as wife of a brilliant man who was humanist, sportsman, scholar and statesman by turns. Left a widow, aged, frail as porcelain, but still of an aloof loveliness, Lady Slane is gently determined to bid farewell to power, glory and clamour of the world's ways, and shake herself free from trammels of her large, managing and pompously absurd family. For peace her soul was yearning, like that of the lovely lady in "Requiescat," and it she sought and found in a small sweet house in Hampstead, surrounded by trees like a Constable painting, where, after a long life of much adventuring, tranquilly she awaited the greatest adventure of all, for which all others are but a preparation.

Here she escaped from obvious pettinesses of a finicking life, her callers a quaint triumvirate, composed of eccentric and unworldly house agent; Gosheron, the builder, who looked so respectable, and, inside and out, wore an ancient bowler hat, green with age; and an old and undeclared lover of her girlhood, world-known art connoisseur and multi-millionaire. Far and far indeed was she from vivid youth that will burn the rivers and whose beauty sets the belfries of the world a-ringing; but in her face, as sometimes may be seen in those of the old, who are attuned with the unseen, there was reflected a shining loveliness of spirit beyond familiar beauty, du diable; for "the face of youth is an unwritten page; and youth can never sit still, in absolute repose, as though all movement were over and nothing left but waiting and acquiescence."

Throughout there prevails an atmosphere of calm acceptance, of high thought unspotted from the world and embalmed reminiscences of human experience. There is penetrating analysis of value of that which the world sets high, and subtle conclusions anent hurly-burly of life, the whole presented in a style that is cultivated, leisurely and wholly delightful.

Prize Poem Competition

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 poem 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 D.P. for the delightful poem, entitled "Fairy Tales," in which are apparent finished craftsmanship and lambent imagination, which will appeal to all those responsive to beauty of fancy and phraseology. Some entries of singular attractiveness have come in during the past fortnight, rendering the task of selection difficult, and encouraging the conviction that literary standards are being well upheld in this young country. Specially commended, though not equal in rounded completeness to the prize-winning poem, is the delightful "Gladness" by O.E.H., a valued contributor to this page.

"Lyttelton," by A.N.I.C., is reserved for further consideration.

"Daffodils" exceeds the 25-line limit.

"Singing Bird" conveys musical impression of divine notes of a bird singing out its heart in a distant haunt.

"The Riro Riro": Another bird song, tiny and lovely. We regret that, for space reasons, we cannot accept for publication both these melodious snatches.

"In a Tram" tells, in easily flowing lines, of that nostalgia for glimpse, even in imagination, of earth's green valleys and hills, which comes in the springtime and renders the poet-heart a-weary of this silly world.

"Erin" sends a plaintive poem which has a touch of the tragedy which follows in the wake of poor humanity.

"New Zealand Mountains" pays tribute to our lovely land, its author being insistent on appreciation of "God's Own Country," and inclining heavily to the platitudinous.

"Pathfinder": Your poem of Nature's contrasts is of considerable appeal.

Fairy Tales

And from the printed page broke sound and form,
The rumour of great pine woods filled with storm,
Down a dim forest aisle, a troop of gnomes
Ran bearing torches, blazing pine-tree cones,
The red light leaped on rugged bough and bark,
And lit green fires where beasts prowled in the dark.

Then suddenly there trembled on the sight
An ocean cavern filled with rippling light
Where droves of coloured fish in jewelled flight
Flitted in clear still water, lucent, green.
On silver sand, with hair of changing sheen,
Fingering a pearl, a foam-white nereid lay
Watching with amber eyes the ripples play.

And then before the charmed eye there seemed
A murmurous land, wind dappled, silver streamed,
Where the frail spires of pearl-pale cities dreamed
In dim green woods, and foaming flowery tracts,
Down the jade steeps fell misting cataracts,
A golden wind set nodding flower and tree,
Afar, dark as a hyacinth, the sea beat up its strand.

And suddenly the years were rainbow spanned,
These were remembered hills of fairy land
But glamour died, and faded form and tint,
The beauty sank into the sober print.

—D.P.

IN "Murder in the Embassy," by "Diplomat," action is concentrated alike in time and space and the central situation is intensely dramatic. Imagine a group of persons shut up in a supposedly deserted Embassy in the intense heat of the Washington summer. One of them has murdered a Japanese Royal Prince, whose body lies upstairs. The Ambassador grants a delay of twenty-four hours, at the end of which he will do justice on the suspect. We have grown a little tired of the theme of the house isolated by floods or snow. But the isolation here rises quite naturally and plausibly out of the crime itself, and is used to great effect. "Diplomat" writes well and draws his characters deftly. This is a book distinctly out of the ordinary class.

IN "Enter the Actress" Miss Rosamund Gilder writes with a lively enthusiasm of the woman who pioneered in the drama. The women who spoke first and not necessarily loudest or most finely are those who have occupied her research. The drama has had more diverse history than any other of the arts; it has been most sacred and most profane. What began as solemn ritual at the tomb has ended largely as an industry of entertainment. Accordingly in this volume we meet such widely contrasted figures as Hrotsvitha, the nun of Gandersheim, who wrote of "things not to be named in order to glorify the innocent," and of Aphra Behn, whose treatment of the unnameable had scarcely the same purpose. She pioneered as a professional whereas the nun had naturally no financial ambitions; so they take their place as partners in innovation. The manageresses are represented by La Montansier, by Carolina Neuber of Germany, and by our own Madam Vestris, whose engaging history elicits a charming chapter on the taste and finance of the English theatre a century ago. Vestris was a pioneer of realism as well as a victorious singer of ballads and a gay romp of breeches parts; she established realistic production, and could be a careful artist in a world of fantastic showmanship; the English theatre owes more to her than is usually acknowledged, and the debt is here rightly paid. Miss Gilder gives Vestris justice; her gallery of notables carries her over the foreign stages of the Middle Ages; in addition, she honours the Englishwomen who obtained equality of grease-paint for their sex in the time of the Restoration. They were colourful creatures, and Miss Gilder's research has not resulted in prose that lacks paint.