

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

Prize Poem Competition

VERY numerous and diverse are the literary activities of Mr. Thomas Moulton, he having proved his mettle as poet, critical essayist, biographer, and anthologist. In the field of fiction "Snow Over Eldon" is well remembered, and now comes a novel, in the method and manner of which he is at one with the Victorian tradition, and in our time that of the later work of Mr. J. B. Priestley and Mr. A. P. Herbert.

The aptly titled "Saturday Night" is a chronicle, meticulous, far-ranging, and eminently companionable, of the doings of Londoners of many types, particularly of the working class and below it; but the true protagonist is the great metropolis itself and the puerilities thereof, in their vitality, glamour, sordidness, tragedy, and humour, described and rejoiced in by one familiar with every highway and byway, and each gleam and sparkle of the refulgent lights of London.

Day in, day out, the doings of the Poplar family are set before us, their tollings and moilings, bubbling optimism, and irrepressible gaieté de coeur. There is the mother, own sister to Mrs. Nickleby, affectionate, lachrymose, and absurd, but putting up a gallantly stubborn fight to bring up five boys without aid from the attractive scamp she married, who speedily proved himself to be entirely undesirable in the role of a husband.

In particular, sympathy goes out to Mark, fifteen years old when the story begins, looking for work, eager to help to keep going the family menage, and with wistful memories of a time when that menage included the agreeable failure who was his father. Mark, his young face looking "as though the Creator had fashioned it out of a sunshiny morning," makes his debut in business world per medium of dusty, fusty law office, where he is white slave to an odd dozen clerks, and only dares to steal fleeting glance at the lovely old trees in the grounds of Lincoln's Inn, "their gossamer gold shedding into autumnal glades, bordered by silver fogs." Of the denizens of this office there are portraits limned with caustic wit and not without malice; from the old soaker Hirst, whose violin was his refuge from mean standards of a world he held in sardonic contempt, to Kiddy Kay, bully and blusterer, who wields cheap and nasty authority over unfortunate underlings.

As the years pass Mark's fortunes improve, and he widens experience by rent-collecting in unsavoury streets and falling in love with the gentle Lily. The love affair of this shy girl and boy, its beauty of youth and evanescent quality, are presented with an admirable and sympathetic restraint; and the description of a day at Happy

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 A.N.I.C., for the poem entitled "Lyttelton," a virile and picturesque impression, assured of many admirers, of ships for the nonce finding anchorage in sunlit haven. We select for special commendation some verses by a new contributor, "The Little Wings," which are charmingly conceived and of true poetic quality; and "Yearning," by "Ginger," whose work appeals by virtue of skilful phraseology and originality of theme.

B.A.K.: Of the verses sent in by you, we greatly prefer "Dusk," a fascinating vignette of eventide in Maoriland.

"Cantor": Interesting juxtaposition of ideas couched in effective verse form.

"Tuki": Alas, so obvious!

"Ubique": Your poem intrigues interest by reason of its unusual treatment of an unhackneyed theme.

"Vic": No chance.

"Southern Cross": Try the Children's Page in a daily paper.

"Wild Rose": sends a musical trifle which quite sweetly sings itself along to its appointed end.

"Hesperides": We like the lay of a Lovely Lagoon.

"Courtland": Jingle of the irritating variety.

"Francis": The worst ever.

Lyttelton

*Slowly up the harbour, golden-eyed and dreaming
The ships come to Lyttelton, bound from farthest seas,
Coal hulks and barges, battleships and steamers,
With passengers and cargoes from many foreign quays.*

*There is singing on the docks of the coal hulks and barges,
The rattling of cables and the tramp of many feet,
The sharp tang of seaweed, and orange-peel and onions,
The sound of merry laughter and the engines' steady beat.*

*Sailing into Lyttelton the battleships and steamers,
Come steadily and silently, like monarchs marching by,
With well-oiled engines, and dull greasy funnels,
And deep, quiet voices, and flags flying high.*

*And all day long, with the wind in their riggings,
And sunlight gleaming on brass rope and spar,
They lie there at anchor and dream in the silence
Of deep-sea places where the drowned galleons are.*

*Whither are you going, you great black barges?
Whither are you bound, you battleships grey?
Waking with the dawn, when the mists fade in amber. . . .
Oh! would I were in Lyttelton to see you sail away.*

—A.N.I.C.

Hampstead, in company with the sophisticated Matthew and his inamorata, is excellent.

The end falls on a note of tragedy, the melodramatic murder of the scintillating Ninon not appearing entirely

coherent with the rest of the novel, which stands or falls by its panoramic presentment of the numerable types and facets, animate and inanimate, which go to make up the microcosm of London.

IT adds to the pleasure of a book like "The Good Earth" to know some-

thing of the life of its author. Mrs. Pearl Buck is a daughter of missionaries to China, and except for a spell of university life in America has spent all her life there. She has taught at the University of Nanking and at the Government University under the Empire and the Republic. She speaks Chinese with native fluency. Her novel has as hero a peasant of China, who begins with possession of a small parcel of land and, by frugality and a passion for the good earth, makes himself a rich farmer. The beauty of her book comes from her deep sympathy with the simplicity of the Chinese national character. Wang Lung is every Chinese; and although the tale is set in modern times, in him the ages of Chinese history survive. Labour, marriage, parenthood, love, loss, prosperity, grief and death are the accidents of his story, as they are of ours, and it is through these, so simply and movingly described, that we can enter into his very heart. "The Good Earth" is true as the Book of Ruth is true; by a deeply controlled tenderness it shows the individual as sharer in the common lot of humanity. It is a triumph to have made a man whose ways are altogether strange so unmistakably human to us.

CASSANDRA, daughter of the learned Dr. Fazakerley, losing her mother at birth, has been brought up by her father as a vestal virgin devoted to the Temple of Learning. The professor has ideas a hundred years in advance of his generation up to a certain point. Cassandra is proficient in all sorts of ologies and dead languages, but, as a gipsy woman tells her, she is as innocent as a babe unborn about worldly matters. Into the quiet, cloistral life of this young girl bursts a riotous undergraduate of Cambridge, Douglas Arlesey, and the inexperienced maiden falls an easy victim to the arrows of Cupid. Happily all the badness of Douglas is very much on the surface. Underneath there is a sterling character which rises to do battle for Cassandra, now besieged by several suitors more or less acceptable to her father. But nothing will melt the adamant heart of the professor in regard to the one man his daughter desires to marry, not his rescue from a highwayman, nor from his burning laboratory, nor from bodily sickness and discomfort. Not, in fact, till his daughter shows every symptom of dying, in exemplary fashion, of a broken heart, does he relent, and in doing so finds his own happiness. Thus, couched in quaint, almost formal, language of an age gone by, runs the story of Miss Aelfrida Tillyard's "Haste to the Wedding," a delightful and amusing book.