

.... With BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

TO the student of social history and the bibliophile, "The Englishman and His Books in the Early Nineteenth Century," will prove an exceedingly interesting and agreeable chronicle. The author, Mrs. Amy Cruse, takes the reader from the stilted days when Madam d'Arblay's "Camilla" first saw the light, right down through the years, annotating with vivacious and illuminating comment the personality and achievement of a long list of statesmen, philosophers and inspired contributors to the belles lettres of that brilliant period.

For her subject matter the author has delved, with patient and acumen, into ancient biographical lore, diaries, letters, publishers' statistics and reviews, and she makes able and excellent use of her investigation of that rich treasure-trove.

Politics and drama of the age are discussed with animation and humour; and a floodlight of critical comment let loose upon the highlights of that shining firmament which coruscated the genius of Wordsworth, Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Charles and Mary Lamb, Shelley, Godwin, Hazlitt, and the charming youth who afterward became Lord Palmerston.

Contemporary journalism and correspondence are invoked to add verisimilitude to fascinating pen portraits of men and women famous in their day and after; and there is a description of leisured literary society in the days when Mr. Macaulay dined at Holland House; languishing maidens kept albums wherein enamoured swains were blushing implored to "dash off" a poem and sign it with notable names—a deplorable custom not yet wholly extinct; and beauteous ladies in trailing high-waisted gowns flocked to hear the witty Sydney Smith give his famous lecture on "Taste," when we are told the charm of his manner, happy geniality spread throughout the hall, intonations of attractive voice, and glances and gestures carried his audience away.

Thumbnail sketches of melodrama at the Surrey are acutely revealing; and there is an illuminating sketch of Fanny Kemble, fresh from Paris boarding school, making unwilling debut on the boards to save the family financial fortunes.

It is impossible in the space available to do justice to this fascinating medley of other times, other manners, which is to be recommended cordially to commonalty and connoisseurs.

Prize Poem Competition

THE prize of half-a-guinea in the current competition is awarded to M.F.P. for "Lure of the Woods," a poem of fleeting and elusive beauty. Selected for commendation is "Spring Song," by D.A.S., an impressionistic study of blaze of flowers in Wellington streets; and "Toti's" "Adrift," which gives a striking metrical presentation of a grim theme.

S.C.McC.: Ethel Mannin's "Confessions and Impressions" (7/6) is procurable from Whitcombe and Tombs, Wellington. Prompt application is advisable, as stocks are almost exhausted.

V.S.J.'s songlet is still another plea, and a musical one, for poor "robin-red-breast in a cage."

"Armistice Day, 1931": A great motif elaborated with some degree of success.

"Greta's" symbolic small poem is good enough to warrant expectation of still better work from this young follower of the Muse.

"Cupid's Song": Original and attractive in expression.

"Red Rose": Your small vignette of landscape under passing shower is sincere and immature and sweet.

"To Passers By": Visionary underlying thought handled with vigour and clarity.

"Erin's" work has a quality of rounded completeness, combined with recognition of things of the spirit, but we do not like the split infinitive in second verse.

"John Storm" sends attractive Villanelle constructed with this contributor's enviable verbal facility.

M.L.G. gives poignant expression of exploitation, "for a crust," of personal emotion and heartbreak of those who see visions and dream dreams.

"Thoughts of a City Dweller": A peaceful and tranquil Mecca presented with considerable skill in versification, two concluding lines slightly marring the charm of phraseology.

O.E.H.: Thanks for suggestion regarding "Homeland." I should like to add another voice to the chorus of appreciation. You are right in surmising that the work sent in to this page is of high average quality; sometimes, indeed, an *embarras des richesses*.

"Summer Song": Happy-hearted verses of metrical spirit and charm.

"Rafferty Ronald" apparently is as great a devil-may-care as his film name-sake.

"Feathers": Puff, puff!

Lure of the Woods

*Ah! Let me run through the tangled ways
Of the wind-swept trees in the forest maze
A thing of the wind and sunshine!
A song in my throat, and a laugh that wakes
The dreaming depths of the leafy brakes,
And an echo throws to the sky.*

*If I faintly piped upon a reed,
Would you hear the music and, taking heed,
Follow the glint of my dancing feet?
I would lead you around the shallow mere,
Slip into the sleeping waters there,
You could never follow so fleet,*

*If you saw through a shimmering beam
The lure of a slim white arm, or a gleam
Of flying hair. Past the forest pond
You would stumble over the creepers low
Till you caught my hand—But no! ah no!
You would hold fast—a willow wand!*

—M.F.P.

MRS. ELINOR MORDAUNT has written some excellent fiction, but her latest novel, "Full Circle," perhaps will not add greatly to her already established reputation. It is the story of Levenson Hurle, who writes novels and plays on the principle of photography, that is to say, he takes the incidents he sees around him, the private and less reputable episodes in the lives of his acquaintances, and writes them up for the delectation of his public. By this more or less simple method he succeeds in achieving fame and fortune, but is an unspeakable bounder, and one finds it hard to believe in him. There is good work here and there, as is inevitable with an author of the calibre of Mrs. Mordaunt—such, for example, as scenes in Penang and Singapore—but the book as a whole is unworthy of its creator.

A BOOK to be eagerly awaited is "Portraits and Appreciations," by Viscount d'Abernon. This, as the title indicates, is a collection of personal sketches of statesmen and artists and writers, many of whom were the intimate friends of Lord d'Abernon, who has known eleven Prime Ministers and puts in the front rank Lord Balfour, of whom he gives an admirable pen portrait. We also are given an arresting study of Lord Oxford, with all his great qualities and inherent weaknesses of character, he, apparently, like lesser folk, having a rooted objection to talking things over. "Colleagues and experts were occasionally invited to have a quiet talk with Henry," but history records no case of anyone having had it. The Prime Minister was busy; he had a headache; he had gone for a drive; anything rather than the ordeal of talking things over." So reprehensible, and so entirely human!

TO be added to the not inconsiderable list of really lifelike children's books is "Emil and the Detectives," now published in an excellent translation, and with the added attraction of an introduction by Mr. de la Mare. The young protagonist who tries so assiduously to be at all times a model is essentially a human boy, and the story of his remarkable adventures on his way to Berlin, the dire exploits of the man wearing a bowler hat, and the ramifications of exploits of the young detective gang, will be found priceless by children in England as well as Germany. The black and white drawings illustrating the volume are an added attraction.