

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Jottings

MR. T. F. POWYS has an undoubted flair for the macabre in literature, which is exemplified in "Uncley," his latest strange and terrible tale. This nightmarish imaginative tour de force concerns a small village which is the halting-place of a Dread Visitant, and is not to be recommended to hysterical or squeamish readers. It is strong meat, lust reigns, and horror and wickedness are rampant as Death stalks amidst terror-stricken community. An extraordinarily exciting story, however, with a quality of imagination that definitely enchains attention, and a power of envisagement that is extremely uncanny.

MISS PAMELA FRANKAU, scion of literary stock and a chip of the old block, continues to write novels. This very young writer has plenty of talent, as already she has proved, and her latest novel, "Born at Sea," is cleverly constructed. She shows the tendency of a section of modern youth to dwell on the more unpleasant protagonists of life and fiction, her characters being in large part made up of blackmailers, neurotics, and other disagreeable people. Her hero is not born under a lucky star, for his wife has a lover, his heart has a tendency to play him false, and life is not exactly roseate-hued. However, eventually he finds an object in life that revivifies his desire to live and move and have his being in this drab world, and the story ends on a gayer note. The story is interesting and arresting, but too much insistence is laid upon the happy side.

THE late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has been much in the public eye and thought for a great many years, and now we have a biography of him, written by the Rev. John Hammond, a Presbyterian minister, entitled "Arthur Conan Doyle." The Church of Rome was Sir Arthur's earliest spiritual home, his mind being essentially religious, and he always was on the side of the angels, a champion of lost causes, and an ardent fighter for what he considered the truth. The wife of the renowned writer contributes an epilogue to the book, in which she states that the only people he had a contempt for were moral cowards, liars, self-seekers, and those who were cruel to man or beast. Truly the Spiritualistic communion, on whom he spent £200,000, have lost a magnificent friend and comrade.

## Our Fortnightly Book Review

### Return I Dare Not

By MARGARET KENNEDY

MISS KENNEDY is very subtle and analytical in her latest novel, which is primarily the story of some crucial days in the history of a rising novelist and dramatist, who has three successful plays running simultaneously in London, and still remains unspoiled and unspotted from the wicked world which makes much of him for the nonce. Realising, however, that his footing in the social edifice is somewhat insecure, to the utmost of his power, he lives up to his reputation for wit and bonhomie, and blithely accepts an invitation for a week-end at Syranwood, which is the happy hunting-ground of a house party, which beginning on a note of debonaire gaiety, crashes at the end to something like disaster for several of the protagonists.

At first, however, all goes well, and Hugo is fortune's favourite, sought by society beauties as, "the most amusing person, my dear," and pursued by photographers and paraphrasts, his very shoe-laces being imbued with news value. At the stately home of England which Miss Kennedy has selected as the milieu of her story, he is surrounded by celebrities and scions of ancient and modern society, the bright particular star in the firmament being Lady Aggie, a frisky grass-widow, with the face of a Madonna and the inclinations of a wanton. Hugo she endeavours to ensnare; he continuing to be naive, agreeable, and romantic by turns, in fact a Thoroughly Nice Young Man, until he falls from grace.

Froth and frivol prevail, risqué stories and illicit love-making. In the background hover two charming young things, who, after recent emergence from schoolroom, live quite amusing days in the wake of the gay concourse of iridescent human butterflies who preen and flutter and go through their tricks to their own entire satisfaction. Indications of the reactions of Solange and Marianne to the enured week-enders, the poised and intelligent intendment of modern youth, are excellently well conveyed, and its candid comments on the denizens of Vanity Fair entertaining to a degree. One is perhaps more intrigued with Miss Kennedy's understanding of youth's devastating iconoclasm in its penetrating analysis of its elders, than by the portraits of those sophisticates themselves, who nevertheless are presented with a consummate and mordant satire.

The portrait of Ford Usher, red-faced, middle-class, with a brilliant scientific mind and clumsy methods of tracking down his aristocratic lady love is a masterpiece of portraiture; and there are also the histrionic Sir Adrian, making desperate social efforts and ignoring sordid family ties which insistently intrude themselves; Gibbie the Good Man; the egoistic and inquisitive Corry Cooke, who on principle was the last to go to bed because he hated the thought of missing anything; and the inimitable octogenarian hostess, with her past history of romantic promiscuity and present entire absence of tact.

Miss Kennedy has remarkable powers of observation. "At Syranwood the surface was almost flawless. The mechanism, the apparatus, dinner table, flowers, women's fair, long-extended faces, bloom of peaches in Wedgwood baskets, all exquisite; but there was nothing exquisite about the parrot noises made by the guests, no originality, no real freedom, and no beauty beyond that which money can secure."

By way of contrast is the supercilious Lady le Fanu's comments on the house where her lover, Ford Usher, spent his raw youth. "The dining-room smelt of pickles and whisky; the drawing-room like a public call-box—Gold Flake and people; Mrs. Usher's room of alcohol and moth-ball; the lady-help's (who used scent instead of soap) of benzine and cosmetics; and the larder like a stopped-up sink."

Pickle favour of the great is withdrawn from Hugo, already at heart weary of an anomalous position, and he turns with gladness to the fresh youth of the girl Marianne, who consoles him and sets him afresh on the upward path, with a few home-truths and a shyly candid revelation of childish devotion. And so with a vague indication of future romantic fruition, Hugo more or less silently steals away, purposely boarding the wrong train and disappearing into the limbo of the socially unknown.

There is little plot, and the merit of the novel lies in brilliant characterisation and clear-sightedness about the world and its ways. A notable book, although not altogether up to the standard established for herself by the author of "The Constant Nymph."

MR. C. P. HAWKES'S "Wind in the Bus-tops" is a charming guide to London. Now it is to an old saddle-shop in Long Acre that he introduces you, now to the "strange smells and tramontane colour" of Soho, that "pastiche of bits of Paris, Como, Naples, and Madrid." A Punch and Judy Show or a Bloomsbury party, the "Scotchman's Cinema" or a Prom. provide opportunities for the author's nimble pen. Mr. Hawkes is the complete Londoner, and would agree, we feel sure, with Dr. Johnson. "Sir," said that great man, "when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life."

"HIGH SUMMER" is a beautifully-written tale, characterised by excellent pen portraits and sense of subtleties of social reactions for which its author, Mr. Richard Church, is to be congratulated. The story itself concerns the somewhat unoriginal theme of revolt of a woman against unhappy matrimonial venture, and subsequent effort to hew out a niche in the temple of worldly success. There is, in fact, but little plot; the style's the thing, emphatically, in this subtly presented story.

PLEASURABLE anticipation is excited by the announcement that Mr. Eden Philpotts has written a volume entitled "Essays in Little," touching upon such diverse subjects as the right use of words; Dartmoor in some of its many moods; a great German philosopher whose influence of morality and mentality has been extraordinarily far-reaching; and the author's hope for the future in "the present winter-time of disillusion and discipline." Mr. Philpotts is known to very many readers of novels and plays in this Dominion, who will welcome him in a new literary role.

STUDENTS of the art of the short story do not need to be told that Mr. A. E. Coppard is excellent in his particular genre. He is so accomplished a craftsman, such a master of the delicate skill and knowledge that are requisite in this branch of fiction, that his new volume of ten tales entitled "Nixey's Harlequin," will be sought with avidity by those who appreciate his work. The stories touch on many aspects of the passing show, but perhaps the best of all is that of the Polish nobleman and English novelist who held rendezvous in a tumble-down hostelry in Austria.