

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

"JULIAN PROBERT," the latest novel from the pen of that competent novelist, Miss Susan Ertz, is quite worthy of her entertaining talent. A study of social conditions at the present time, the story concerns primarily the love story of a distinguished scientist, unhappily yoked in matrimony, and Pauline Trellett, a modern novelist, the latter a charming, level-headed, generous-hearted, modern product, who has freed herself from prejudice, but not from warm-hearted generosity in word and deed toward her fellow-creatures. Their love story runs as even a course as any love story can that is outside the recognition of convention. A subsidiary love story, and a charming one, with all the flavour of youth and spring-time, is that of Julian himself and the audacious and entirely lovable Hildegarde. The description of the friendship of this boy and girl is fresh and fragrant, and set in skilful juxtaposition with the mature and troubled progress of the love affair of the elder Probert.

Characterisation is admirable, in particular that of Mrs. Probert, self-centred, hysterically pious, and of a mollusc-like devotion to her son, whose vitality she drains and, whose life she saddens by selfish demands. Then there is the Rev. Attwood, that kind cleric, who, with motives of the best, arouses hotbed of unhappiness in unregenerate young hearts. Perhaps most interesting of all is Pauline's father, that erratic journalist, who somewhat too late falls violently in love with a beautiful girl, given to dissimulation, whose unrevealed past at an inopportune moment confronts her and blights ambitions dreams. The clash between the ageing and accomplished dramatic critic and Gogan, the bouncer, who returns to claim the lovely and unprincipled Sandra, when intelligence and qualities of the spirit are worsted in an encounter with coarse vitality, is one of the best things in this excellent tale of modern life, in which there are no dull moments. The story goes with elan and vivacity, the conclusion of the whole matter being something in the nature of a note of interrogation; but in sum total many readers will decide it is not quite in the best manner of the author, who gained their suffrages in "Now East, Now West" and "After Noon."

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Prize Poem Competition

THE PRIZE of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to a new contributor, "H.T." for "The Pedlar," which will create admiration by reason of musical versification and poetic awareness. Selected for special commendation is the fascinating "Reverie," by "P.Q.," which we are holding in the meantime for further consideration. Also to be commended for beauty of vision and literary flair is "The Seeker," by "Greta," which we regret that, for space reasons, we are unable to publish. Comments of correspondents:—

"I think 'Age' an excellent poem, with fine idealistic theme and excellent spiritualistic conception. May I congratulate 'K.M.W.' on his—or her—work?"

"The prize poem, 'Lure of the Woods,' filled me with delight and a great dissatisfaction with my own efforts, but I can never stop scribbling." (Very charming "scribbling," be it said, judging by our own experience of it.)

"The Bowl of Moraing": Fine literary craftsmanship is apparent in your paean to earth's beauty.

"Erin" sends some rippling lines that call for a musical setting.

"The Stork" is a poetic conception of the story that is old as the world.

"Country Cornflower": Yes, they may be used elsewhere if not published by this paper. Thanks for your note. We, too, regret necessity for curtailing space devoted to this column.

"Dreams". An impressionistic effect, and a charming one, of ever-recurring beauty, first and third verses being the best.

D.A.S.: We are in accord with your vigorous protest.

S.E.F.J. sends a rhyming questionnaire.

"Disturbed": Unrhythmic and not up to standard.

"Lights and Reminiscences" and the second poem possess high spirituality and some facility of expression, but the lines do not always scan.

"Wellington City": An interesting composition from the historical point of view, but it could be rendered as well, perhaps better, in straight-out prose.

Ferdinand: How could you?

Nitouche: Try comic cuts.

... The Pedlar ...

Where thou goest, vaunt thy wares:
Perfumes of the earliest morn,
Distilled from the ambient air;
Jewels night-hath lately worn,
Gifts which God Himself prepares.

Beauties all wayfarers meet,
Dreams incomparably sweet,
Hopes set high as arching skies,
Innocence in children's eyes,
Ships upon the morning's rim,
High noon in a pleasant land,
Wind along the tussock hill,
Slow seas slipping over sand.

Pedlar with the eyes serene,
Thou hast goods which all have seen,
And forgotten many days;
To thy purchaser shall come,
Deeper than the poppy sleep,
Swift forgetfulness of cares,
Joy return to all his ways.

—H.T.

MISS NAOMI ROYDE-SMITH'S brilliant talent is shown to advantage in her study of Julie de Lespinasse, entitled "The Double Heart." In 1753 an unknown girl, who had been a governess in a household that was monstrously unconventional even in those days of license, went to live with her patron, the great saloniere of Paris, Madame de Deffand. Speedily the nameless and penniless dependant proved her mettle. Blue Stocking and Muse of the Encyclopaedists, she added to coruscating literary gifts that of enslaving men, and was idolised by several of the most notable men in Europe. The atmosphere of those long-ago days of delicate wit, cruel irony, leisurely and famous gatherings of men and women who were great names in the world of letters and affairs of State, is presented with a clarity and knowledge of the eighteenth century that will enchain all lovers of that picturesque period.

THERE are many who agree with Mr. Galsworthy's dictum that the late Stacy Aumonier is one of the best short-story tellers of all time. Unfortunately his literary output was not large, and the book of short stories by this consummate artist, entitled "Little Windows," which recently has been published, will be given an eager reception. Good writers in this genre are rare, and it may be the present collection will fail to come up to high expectation created when name of author is disclosed. The master hand, however, is apparent in these tales of pathos, grim tragedy, humour, and suspense; for, though not all up to standard of his best short stories, Stacy Aumonier was enough of an artist to imbue everything he wrote with something of his own peculiarly iridescent quality. Perhaps the most arresting of all the tales is that which concerns nightmare of a man left alone in a city tenanted entirely by rats, in which atmosphere of tension and horror are superbly conveyed.

"THE WHICHARTS" are three very charming children, the illegitimate daughters of a distinguished soldier. They grow up and gravitate toward the stage, where the two elder ones, by reason of natural and inherited grace and talent, speedily become very much in request by reason of the ineffable and elusive quality of charm. The youngest of the trio, Tania, cares nothing for the microcosm of the theatre, and seeks for her mother, who has been lost to her in childish years. This is, one imagines, Miss Noel Street's initial attempt at fiction and is very delightful and intriguing, with a fresh and joyous quality of its own.