

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

IN "A Certain Man," Mr. Oliver Onions tells a good story, embracing many angles of interest and originality. Primarily the history of a period in the life of Christopher Darley, advertising manager of the M.P.G. Combine, and Merger, reputable householder, father of a family, and still alert and springy enough, though with silvering temples. There are also Jill and Nickey and Rennie, extremely modern young things, Nicky a waiter and dancing partner, Jill in a flower-shop en route to matrimony, and her friend Omphale graduating for the oldest profession in the world.

On the bus that trundles him daily to his dry-as-dust office, Christopher holds strange converse with an elusive stranger, with soothing effect on doubts and difficulties that beset the harassed head of his spectacular family and its entourage. But this strange acquaintance is but a ship that passes in the night on Christopher's horizon, leaving, however, a curious legacy in the shape of a garment, of curious fashion and texture, that palely glistens in the night-time, and is possessed of certain blood-curling eccentricities.

Donned by Christopher, the coat of destiny proves power of allaying the fret and fume of this world's woes, healing scars of the spirit, and instilling a high spiritual nobility. Conveyed rather than described are its strange qualities, and there are illusive and slightly perplexing references to old-time orgies and sinister heathen rites.

Sported in everyday surroundings of this year of grace, the coat proves entirely incompatible with the materialistic outlook and rampant individualism of the protagonists of life's poor play; but for a time the spell works, and the moody and unsympathetic husband and father burgeons into a gay generosity and comprehending companionship like a rose in bloom. There are bad lapses, however, for the coat loses inspirational power, and a repentant Christopher sets off for a far country to study Egyptology and commune with sphynxian mysteries.

A strange tale, with a dash of the supernatural, a suggestion of unknown horror, set in juxtaposition with excellent pictures of a modern household and its yearly holiday at Le Touquet.

Prize Poem Competition

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to "M.H." for "Autumn," a skilful and beautiful treatment of the difficult sonnet form which will command admiration. Some delightful work was received during the past fortnight, though, curiously enough, only one poem found inspiration in the great commemorative anniversary of Christendom. This poem, entitled "Noel," is published on the opposite page. Also selected for special commendation is "Ginger's" very lovely "Cabbage Tree Palm."

"To a Stranger": Intuitive and arresting. Sorry there is no room for triolet.

"Toti" sends an unusual, cleverly etched cameo of verse.

"Novice" couples loving and accurate observation of nature's miracles with certain facility of expression, and is on the right road.

"Smilax": We like your last small sheaf, especially the cadence and appeal of "Resignation":

They are not long, Youth's dreams, Ambition's urges,
The things for which we pray and plan and scheme;
Out of the mist our path awhile emerges,
To lose itself again as in a dream.

"Ferdinand" is intelligent, frank, naive, and very, very young.

"Nitouche": Too much wagon and too little star.

"Florodora": Your pretty rhymes are so true, and alas, so commonplace.

"Early Victorian" is all for the simple life in the modern manner, the verses submitted entirely belying demureness of selected *nom de plume*.

"Communistie Clara": No, indeed!

"Scottish Chief": Shades of Robert the Bruce!

"Devout Lover": Why so pale and wan? We all go through it!

"Flaneur": Try something simple.

AUTUMN

One evening late I saw you passing by
A park of gilded trees, while soft the air,
Low breathing, scattered scarlet here and there;
The mellow sun seemed lingering in the sky
As though he wept to part—was loth to die
Before he'd once again caressed your hair.
And made it laugh to life, the fair more fair—
Then wanly smiled and faded, with a sigh,
A hush . . . and all the day's last light seemed fled
Behind the hills, the sky drained grey, the whole
Earth dim. But still I saw about your head,
Faint gleaming there, the sun-god's aureole!
You passed. Then truly all the world was dead.
But symphonies were stirring in my soul.

—"M.H."

MISS MARGERY ALLINGHAM'S "thriller," "Police at the Funeral," is to be recommended. It has a quality usually wanting in detective works, and is a very ingenious tale of murders in the Trumpington house. Our sympathies are intrigued, we read on breathlessly, and feel certain that conviction shall be sheeted home to one of two people. In either case we shall regret it. Then comes the authentic surprise, without which the best-written "thriller" falls flat. Even the most inveterate "guesser" will find it hard to elucidate this cleverly contrived fictional farrago, and when the mystery is solved and the story ends with considerable éclat it is realised that Miss Allingham is to be reckoned within the field of the detective novel.

MRS. SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN'S novels anent South African life have a large public, which will welcome with avidity her latest story, "The Sons of Mrs. Aab." And there will be no disappointment, for it is in the author's best vein. Tragic, grim and sordid in parts though it is, the story enchains interest from cover to cover. It treats of the unlucky Gideon Aab, a plaything of malignant fate. Everything goes against him, his luck in the diamond fields fluctuates, his domestic relationships are of unsympathetic nature, and the brother who is "wanting" refuses to shuffle off this mortal coil and is a continuing millstone round the neck of the unhappy Gideon. There are several subsidiary stories and an impressive denouement, the whole being related in Mrs. Millin's most admirable literary manner.

ORIGINALITY is a rare attribute, but it is exemplified in a volume of short stories entitled "The Pothergill Omnibus." There are eighteen tales in the book, and they are all written around the same plot by well-known authors. The plot set by Mr. Pothergill for treatment by his notable contributors is the somewhat hackneyed one of a man who writes letters to an unknown, which has been a periodical trick of the writing trade for a good many years. Marriage finishes for the nonce the romanticism thereby engendered. After a time, however, when domesticity palls, the correspondence is again entered into, only to discover that the intriguing unknown is the wife who has turned out not altogether satisfactorily. The distinguished coterie who elucidate this theme with wit and wisdom is composed of such literary idols as Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Bullett (who gives a very unusual twist to his narrative), Mr. Coppard, Mr. J. C. Squire, Mr. Thomas Burke, and Miss Delatfield. Truly a galaxy of stars.

A VERY interesting series called "The Shilling Library of a Hundred Books" has been launched by Burns, Oates and Washbourne. It consists of standard Roman Catholic works of fiction, spiritual reading, theology and lives of the Saints, covering a very wide range of authors from all over Europe.

MR. J. S. FLETCHER has many admirers, who will welcome the news that he has collected a number of his short stories under the title of "The Man in No. 8." These tales of crime and mystery have appeared in sundry English and American magazines, and are indicative of his exceedingly skilful manipulation of his ingenious plots, his flair for characterisation, and his breezy and engaging literary style. Most of them thrillers, with a sustained interest that enchains, there are others of a more subtle attraction, notably a London idyllic trifle conveyed with a wistful and graceful charm.