

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Jottings

Our Fortnightly Book Review

BLOW BUGLES BLOW

An English Odyssey

By EDWARD MOUSLEY

THIS is a remarkable novel, though not for those who reiterate with smug and tiresome emphasis that they are weary of all things connected with the Great War. Its author, Captain Mousley, R.F.A., is a London barrister and an accomplished literateur. In "Blow, Bugles Blow," are narrated with meticulous accuracy, great spiritual comprehension and artistic sincerity, the searing experiences following in the wake of the War, its strange rapprochements, and imperishable communion between the quick and the dead.

This story begins with last night at Cambridge of John Sparrow, typical of his class and country. We meet his friends, in particular Danny, handsome Rugger blue, heir to many acres, whom the high gods have marked down for heroic death in the desert, brought down by a Turkish gun. "They left Danny beside a patch of wild mus tard, his broken engine eloquent of the good fight and dauntless soul of man, while John saw, as in a mirage, the spires of Cambridge."

There are some excellent pen-portraits. Rivers, who leaned to Quakerism, loathed strife, and had written a book called "Quiet Moments." Him the War caught up, tortured and flung to the void. And the temperamental Acchy, in his Chelsea studio, where on the eve of departure to the War, John meets the German Gretchen, a fair, sweet saint, and loves her with the love that endures. She plays to him "celestial music which, in a moment of miracle, the ear of Beethoven caught as it flowed through a casement of heaven left open—beauty surpassing anything less than God, revealing God—the second movement of the Sonata in F minor, Andante con moto. He turned to look upon her while she wove round herself a white flame of light of sacredst purity through which, more magical than Brunhilde's ring of fire, none but he who loved her might pass." Truly a lovely impression of man's worshipful regard.

There are unforgettable impressions of the campaign in France and in the East, and extraordinarily vivid presentation of juxtaposition of beauty and horror, carnality, spirituality effulgent, sacrificial love, great heart of man and overwhelming longing for the Divine. Vitriolic descriptive power is shown in hatred of war's cruelty and horror, but there is insistent faith in soul of man triumphant over tragedy of the flesh. A wise student of individual and mass psychology, Mr. Mousley's characterisation is strong and subtle. With unerring touch he sets before us saint and sinner, sad crusader and happy warrior, the untouched loveliness of Gretchen's soul and body contrasted with the wiles of Avril the harlot. All pass under destiny's lash, many are broken on the wheel.

Llewelyn the fanatical priest, is a memorable study, recognising as he did the tragedy of suffering unspeakable, but when he saw men driving their bodies forward into the fire, as they did at Gheluvelt, saw "the divinity of Christ on earth"; and one remembers "poets lifting their eyes above the desert of inescapability and horrific filth to the beauty of some quiet autumn dawn."

And through it all is Gretchen in London, shunned, friendless, alone in her attic writing letters to John at the War, clinging to courage and a far-off hope. But a German bomb crashes, and the conclusion of the matter is that on Armistice Day John finds her lying upon the iron bed, her light gone out for ever. "He had nothing more to ask of God. Before Life unmasked he stood amid the ruins of a shattered world, except the service he had shared with his dead love, his dead comrades."

Mr. Mousley can be bitter. "Hats off, ye sleek-souled and fat-gutted—profiting from, yet shirking war—that hereafter, in limousines, decked out, as

MISS ETHEL MANNIN has published recently a book of short stories entitled "Green Figs." Some of the tales in this entertaining volume are printed for the first time, the whole being a mosaic consisting of a series of sketches of episodes in the life of childhood. Though slight in plot almost to elusiveness, excellent use is made of somewhat flimsy material, certain of the tales introducing a strong element of the dramatic, and all of them furnishing further evidence of versatility of talent of their young and extremely modern author.

AMONG contemporary Norwegian writers Johan Bejer takes prominent place. Playwright and novelist, his output has been considerable, beginning in 1896 with a novel of Norwegian peasant life. His war books were deservedly acclaimed, and now in "Folk by the Sea" he again introduces his readers to his own countrymen, imparting to his descriptions an amazing verisimilitude which transports one, with effect of strange actuality, to the scenes in which his home-loving, poverty-stricken villagers play out their allotted parts. Such living as is theirs, from birth to death, is wrested by their own efforts from unproductive earth and treacherous ocean. There is no repining, no girding against a grim destiny which is faced with inarticulate courage and endurance; the humble and heroic history of these dwellers in earth's hard places, being envisaged with a narrative power and comprehending sympathy that invite admiration.

the French say, like whores' boudoirs, shall come to pass by stone memorials that stand for long in English villages or throw a shadow on Scotland's lochs. Down on your knees to the Spirit of the Army, that through that awful ordeal shone resplendent until death, seeking no material gain, but dying for those things that endure."

I close with the lines written to the British Army by the great-hearted padre before Loos, on the eve of his extinction:

Drive on! Let the foes of your God
be the course of you
On, on in he fight;
Dealing death to the idols, that struck
at the Christ in you—
Drive on through the Night.
Pass on! Peace falls in the still red
wake of you,
Red, red is the corn
Where the shapes of false gods lie still
by the hand of you—
Pass on—to the Morn.

THOSE who read Miss Stella Benson's book, "This is the End," published in the war years, have kept a steady eye on her recurrent literary output. This has been interesting and original work, and her latest book, "Tobin Transplanted," will not disappoint. It is a story of Manchuria, and is first favourite for the year's Femina-Vie Heureuse. Miss Benson, in actual life Mrs. O'Gorman Anderson, has travelled extensively, but China is at present her home, her husband being an official in the Chinese Customs service. Her experience of life has been varied and for a time she kept a shop in Hoxton, where she had gained many revealing psychological sidelights from her cockney customers.

"LESLEY STORM" is a graduate of Aberdeen University and the wife of Dr. J. R. D. Clark, who practises in the Limehouse district. She has already written two novels, and her latest book, "The Secret Marriage," is excellent according to its fashion. It is the story of two bright young things who make a secret marriage, going back to their respective avocations from Monday till Friday and spending the week-ends together. During one of their bean-feasts they are tracked down by an unpleasant person from the home town of Robin, that modern youth, who keeps the interloper quiet by ingenious methods. Then there is Annie Armstrong, with a strong mother-in-law complex, an admirable presentment of a type, who swamps the young wife in a morass of sentiment, making her "the scapegoat for the daughters she did not have." This breezy modern comedy makes good reading and should not be missed by those in search of light entertainment.

AN American writer, Mr. Arthur Hodges, has written a novel that inevitably challenges comparison with Mr. Galsworthy's "Man of Property." A brave man indeed, for though the Forsyte Saga may or may not appeal to all in a like degree, there can be no doubt of its amazingly skilful craftsmanship, and its value as a balanced, thoughtful, and entirely able presentment of past and present social life. "The Man of Substance" essays to do something of the same thing, and concerns family history of an American clan. Wall Street and political graft, it goes without saying, play their part, and there is also much anent the Muses and the lighter side of life. But, as already said, the story invites a comparison that, one surmises, assuredly must be to its disadvantage.