

... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

Book Notes

FROM Ward, Lock and Co., Limited (London and Melbourne), come three novels, diverse as the poles in manner and matter. First in merit, from the point of literary distinction, is Mr. Stephen McKenna's "Pandora's Box and Other Stories." This is a collection of what may be termed social impressions, and is worthy of the creator of the incomparable Sonia, who crashed her way to recognition far back in the war years, and won for Mr. McKenna considerable literary eclat. Since then this author has to his credit much accomplished achievement. In his last volume he triumphantly proves his prowess in what to the English writer is the difficult form of the short story. The tales in the collection vary in quality, and are mostly subtle and skilled analyses of episodes and characterisations of that rampant and frothy section of society once known as the smart set. But Mr. McKenna does not confine his attention to one section of the great world, and is equally at home when he traces the decay of a great English family or the evolution of a pillar of the State. He has the true touch, the light hand, and with practised skill arouses interest in such diverse studies as blackmailing as a fine art or a slyly humorous study of "The Typical Heroine." Perhaps the best sketch in the book is a dialogue at a polo match at Hurlingham, which dissects and exposes the machinations and defeated ambitions of a social climber, this brilliantly etched and inexorable study of a type being a small masterpiece of truth to type and economy of expression.

Far indeed from subtlety of method, but extremely entertaining in its genre, is "The Yellow Wagon," by Charman Edwards. This engrossing tale is frankly melodramatic in quality, and concerns a wild Irish girl who spends her childhood's years in the sordid, bohemian and shifting environment of an old-time travelling theatre. After various vicissitudes, the charming and forceful Sheila forges ahead to fame and fortune. "The Yellow Waggon," tells the tale of that difficult passage to a place in the sun, her rapprochement with the true-hearted Owen, "freckled, ailing and insignificant," but "dear to his friends." From him she was parted for long years, is seduced by the egregious Houston, whom eventually she marries. However loyalty, self-sacrifice, invincible attraction win the day, and all ends happily, though much water flows under the bridges before that desirable conclusion is reached. Battle, murder, and sudden death are rampant, and interest does not flag, the book being well worth while, if only (Continued on fourth column.)

Prize Poem Competition

THE prize of half a guinea in the current competition is awarded to V.S.J. for "Flight of a Song," which is of notably poetic and imaginative quality. Amid the many interesting contributions submitted during the past fortnight, we select for special commendation "The Echo," which in tender gracefulness and increasingly sure technique is the best work yet sent in by "Merrie."

A correspondent asks that occasionally a set subject be chosen for the Poetry Competition. We fall in with this idea to the extent of suggesting that for the next competition, in a fortnight's time, the Bells of Remembrance of Wellington's War Memorial, to be heard for the first time next month, might serve as inspiration, but if competitors prefer to choose their own subject they are at liberty to do so.

"B.A.P.": Your beautiful little poem is held for further consideration.

"Moon's Lover": A graceful effort, and our favourite of three very charming contributions.

"A.J.R.": Thanks for forwarding the musical and haunting "Pool."

"Evening in the Garden" is very good indeed, with felicitous expression and admirable rhythmic sense. We regret that space limits preclude publication.

"Felix": Your poem reminds us of Olive Schreiner's definition of life: A striving and a striving, all ending in nothing.

"Novice" sends a prattling poem about "green valley and hill," but much, much study of word and phrase is necessary before "Novice" becomes even a very minor poet.

"Geraint": Your wistful poem quite excellent in its genre.

"Beyond the Blue" exhibits its author's usual verbal slickness, but rather halts in the last line.

"Felix's" lyrical outburst signifies little, if anything.

"Peri": Eccentricity run riot.

Flight of a Song

No song so sweet as that you sang last night,
Enriched and perfumed with the breath of flowers
Baptised with dew
Wind-rafted strains of melody took flight,
Their sweetness grew,
And moonbeams nestling 'mid the leafy bowers
Caressed the harmony.
Then higher, higher, rose that bland refrain,
The wind sighed suddenly in sympathy,
Bearing the song on, on, from foam to foam
Of suddenly enruffled sea.
Far sped the sweet nocturnal melody,
Mingling with sounds of distant tumbling waves
The breeze to open lattice bore each strain
Of ballad, blended sweetly with a throng
Of mystic beauties in the moonlit glow
Amid the quietude of gloam
I sat enraptured
Then came a hush, the sephyr stilled and lo!
The evanescence of a song.

—V.S.J.

for the sake of that delightful old vagabond and toper, Terry Fitzpatrick.

The third of Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co.'s publications is "The Pitiful Lady," by the late Katharine Tynan, poet and novelist, who will dwell long in the memories of lovers of literature, more perhaps for the haunting charm of her verses than for conspicuous ability as a novelist. Nevertheless she has written some entertaining tales that have pleased a wide circle of novel-readers, and this posthumous story from the versatile Irish writer is quite up to standard. It is the story of a beguiling maiden, who, unknown to herself, has a "lang pedigree" but very few of the world's goods. Nancy, however, has captivating ways and speedily finds friends. A friend of all waifs and strays, human and canine, she embraces the profession of a veterinarian, in order that she may extend her love and help to the four-footed creation. Many a lame dog is helped over the stile, although the delightful Nancy is not so engrossed in her calling that she is unaware of the world of romance, into which she strays by an unexpected bypath of the world's ways. In the sphere of domesticity and simplicity of not too impetuous emotion, this pleasant tale of two pairs of lovers may be recommended for its naive charm and obvious delight in man's faithful four-footed friends.

"PLATO'S BRITANNIA," by Douglas Woodruff (Sheed and Ward, London), is an erudite, vivaciously-written chronicle, which discourses tangentially, and with considerable wit and wisdom, upon the British Empire, its present and future, its ways and works. Old Socrates revivifies a distracted world, and with illuminating and caustic comment to inquisitive coterie sheds fresh light on some of the problems that beset our country.

Many aspects of English Contemporary life come under revealing scrutiny, ranging from impressions of a Greek visitor at Oxford and Cambridge Universities to a dissertation on the Yorkshire dialect and a digression concerning the definition of a much-abused word. "A gentleman," decrees Socrates up to date, "is one who, having power, is pleased to use it sparingly, and it is an Englishman's idea of himself. It is an ideal wholly concerned with social life and a man's relations to his fellows, and one which they are convinced needs money for complete fulfilment, so that they consider the possession of money the larger part of virtue." Mr. Woodruff's amusing volumes, illuminating, didactic, and compact of an ironic humour, is recommended for catholicity and clarity of its summarised conclusions.