

"YOUTH'S ENCOUNTER"

No one can accuse Mr. Compton Mackenzie, the author of *Carnival* and *Youth's Encounter*, of a failure to know the personality of his characters. His new volume has its faults of construction; it is at times too long and too diffuse, and the mystery surrounding Michael's parentage is dwelt upon and hinted at and withheld in a wearisomely tantalising fashion, out of all proportion to the magnitude of the solution. But as a study of the growth, week by week, month by month, year by year, of a human being, from early childhood to school-boy days, and upward through the crucial period of adolescence, until we leave him on the threshold of manhood, *Youth's Encounter* is almost uncanny in its discernment, its grasp of the mental standpoint of the successive periods, its marvellous and sympathetic understanding of the countless trivial details which are so amazingly important to the immature mind of childhood. It requires something more than intuition to write such a probing and intimate study; it is only by recalling memories

of our own childhood with an almost photographic fidelity that any of us could approach this record of a small child's griefs and anxieties and terrors, his queerly distorted conceptions of the realities around him, his true instincts and defective reasonings. For the purpose of giving it a certain glamour of romanticism, the history of Michael is, as already intimated, overhung with a veil of mystery. His mother, whom we always see as a fairy vision of loveliness in a shimmer of rose-coloured draperies, hovers over his bedside at rare intervals; but her visits are always fleeting, and her absences last for weary months, while he and his still younger sister are left to the ignorant and indifferent care of incompetent and drunken servants. His father he never sees, at least not knowingly, and he supposes him to be dead; but the sum and substance of the mystery is that Michael's mother loved a married man, whose wife refused to divorce him, and who atoned as best he could by treating Michael's mother as though she were his wife, so long as he lived, and settling the bulk of his fortune on her at his death. All of which may seem of importance or not, according to your individual preferences in fiction. But what cannot fail to arouse cordial recognition are just a few remarkable scenes: the nightmare dreams of a lonely, frightened child in strange surroundings in the dead of night; the slow awakening of adolescence to the physical facts of life, and certain specific incidents that complete that awakening. These are the features of the book that refuse to be forgotten and that confirm the impression already produced by *Carnival* that Mr. Compton Mackenzie is one of the authors that we cannot afford to overlook.