

News, Notes and Views About BOOKS

By WINNIFRED REEVE
(ONOTO WATANNA)

"When Winter Comes to Main Street" is the ingenious title of Grant Overton's new book. It is a survey and resume of certain of the outstanding novels of the year, with some extremely interesting pen pictures of the authors.

Mr. Overton has a fascinating and scholarly manner of writing. It is astonishing how much illuminative information he has been able to pack into this volume.

Especially chapters are devoted to such personalities as Hugh Walpole, Stewart Edward White, Rebecca West, Arnold Bennett, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Irvin Cobb and others.

"Half Smiles and Half Gestures" is a chapter concerning a dozen or more of the younger and newer writers. "Shameless Fun" opens with a characteristic bit in the manner and pertaining to inimitable writer of uproaring slang. Nina Wilcox Putnam, and includes a story concerning Oliver Herford, of fable fame, which will bear repeating. Herford was in the Doran office, talking about his forthcoming book, while nibbling upon animal crackers. Suddenly he stopped nibbling, and exclaimed with a gasp of dismay:

"Good heavens; I've been eating the illustrations for my book."

"They have only themselves to blame," is the title of a chapter given up to the memoirs and autobiography. Margot Asquith and her clever daughter, Elizabeth, are each given a place in this book. Either Mrs. Asquith's photographs do her immense injustice or her daughter is peculiarly blind, to judge from her description of her mother's beauty.

"My father," writes former Prime Minister Asquith's daughter, "was one of the most brilliant men."

My mother's famous beauty cast far more luster upon his name than his genius. . . . In a way my mother was one of his masterpieces. Her beauty seemed to be enhanced by every hour and season. At forty her hair had gone snow white. The primrose, the daffodil, the flame of gold," and so forth. And again: "My father delighted in perfection. He had discovered it in her and promptly made it his own. I don't know if he ever regretted the unfillable quality of her emptiness. . . . Obviously he loved her, but—well, he did not love her inconveniently." Thus Elizabeth Bibesco Asquith wrote of her famous father and mother. Such pictures as I have seen of the much-talked of Margot reveal anything but seductive beauty. Quite the reverse; but then there is no accounting for tastes, and it is to be assumed that the former prime minister of England was an epicure in women and other things.

Of the other chapters in this meaty volume of Grant Overton's, "Places to Go" and "Uniquities" are interesting, and "Books we Live By" is in a limited way, discriminating. Of the Canadian writers given a place of honor in the book are Frank L. Packard and myself, both of us, by the way, having been born in Montreal.

The December number of our latest Canadian magazine, the Quill, is just out. The publication deserves the support of Canadians. It is put out in extremely good taste, so far as it is physically concerned; the name is an excellent one for a magazine. The matter printed therein is the best obtainable in Canada. Its slogan is "All Canadian," and there is not a story or a poem or an article within its pages that is not written by a Canadian. Finally, it may be said, that it is a rattling good little magazine, to judge from its first two issues. One of the stories at least, "Of Common Type," in the inaugural issue, is, in a way, a little masterpiece. The author of this tale is Stanley E. Gladwell, and the publishers announce a series of stories by him in the Quill.

Of especial interest to Calgary are the future fortunes as an author of Mrs. A. Williams. She has had the unprecedented experience of having her first novel accepted by the first publisher to whom she submitted it, Hodder & Stoughton. In most cases we pass through years of mental drudgery before we come within touch of the cherished goal. We are forced to earn our stripes by toll, sacrifice and discipline. Few of us, indeed, attain to stripes; yet we do not despise those who remain in the ranks, for the unfulfillment of one's aspirations does not necessarily mean that we have worked in vain. We know that it is better to be a poet than to write poetry. From the ranks, on rare occasions, a star of exceptional brilliance occasionally bursts. Sometimes he is nothing but a flash in the night that breaks like a bubble and is heard of no more. Sometimes he takes permanent place in the literary firmament.

It should be a matter of pride to Calgary that Mrs. Williams is a resident here—and intends to be a resident indefinitely. We have many "butchers, bakers and candlestick makers." Most of our professions are overcrowded. We have only a few authors, barely a handful in the whole Dominion of Canada. This clever young woman comes to the fore in a manner that is promising, for she is modest, unsure of herself, excited over the "miracle" of her success in placing her first novel, and is still inclined to believe it a mistake or a dream. When her publishers recently required material concerning her life "for publicity purposes," Mrs. Williams was panic-stricken. As I was a veteran in such matter, she brought her dilemma to me, writing me an exquisitely witty letter, in which among other things she stated that nothing unusual had ever happened to her; she had been born, taught school, married and "in the natural course of events had twins." In justice to her publishers, she wrote she thought she ought to commit suicide or do some sort of gymnastic stunt that would win her a place in the newspapers.

It is pleasant to observe that, though elated over the acceptance of her novel, she is not suffering from that most painful of maladies, peculiar to the small person inflicted with supposed success, viz., the swollen head.

I have had the pleasure of reading Mrs. Williams' novel, and although it is premature to speak of it in review just yet, I may say that "The Judgment of Solomon" is a considerable achievement for a first book, and our Calgary author reveals an imaginative literary gift. If she continues to write, as she declares she intends to do, I predict an enviable future for her in the literary world of Canada.

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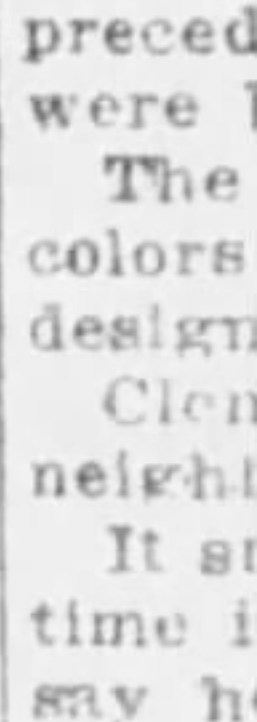
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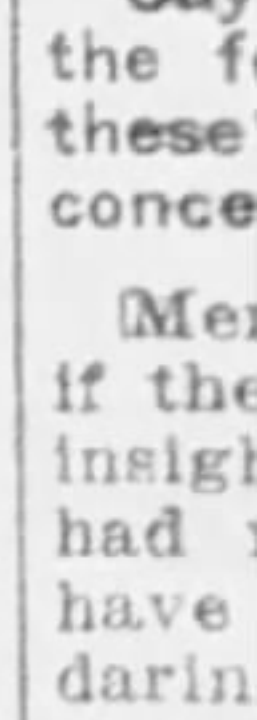


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