

THE MONTH ON MURRAY HILL

The purpose of this section of THE BOOKMAN is to acquaint readers with the publishing activities of George H. Doran Company and their authors.

MY impression of March's entrance was not, as I remember it, particularly lamblike; but as I look at the books it has brought its exit seems truly and magnificently lion-al. There were two publication dates to take care of the books in mere number; much more than a month—even a month of thirty-one days—will be required for the just assimilation of so much quality. New books by Michael Arlen, P. G. Wodehouse, Laurence Housman, Sidney Dark, Gordon Young, Compton Mackenzie, Achmed Abdullah, J. Arthur Thomson and Pauline Smith do not occur monthly, nor always annually. Books like "The Revolt in the Desert," by Lawrence of Arabia, occur once in a lifetime (provided it be a truly exceptional lifetime). Plays like "Broadway" are staged a little oftener, about once in ten years, and are not invariably published then. And let me add, as an Arnold Bennett-diction, that if you find yourself not quite familiar with one or two of the names I mention, be sure you will not long remain so.

Speaking of Arnold Bennett, there is Pauline Smith—. But I will come to her later. Speaking of literary infrequency, which we were first, Mr. Arlen is a fair example. The man writes fiction, which can easily mean a book a year or sometimes better; he has attained to an enormous popularity and of a rare type, the sort in which everything an author has written sells and continues to sell. It is customary to cash in on such an unlimited letter of public credit. Does Mr. Arlen do so? He does not. "The Green Hat", a novel, was published in 1924, and we have had to wait three years for another novel. "Young Men in Love" is the product of a poor business man, and Mr. Arlen ought to have a talk on ways and means with Sir Harry Lauder.

But it is a complete and finished Arlen. Not only is it a novel with body and vintage flavor, but there is no mistaking its authenticity or its fine bouquet. Venetia takes her place more than satisfactorily beside Iris of

"The Green Hat" and the Shelmerdene whose allurements ran like a motif through the tales in "These Charming People". She is a lady, Shelmerdene, who inspires rather than handicaps literary effort; but I gather that P. G. Wodehouse knows a woman distractingly opposite. His new book, "Divots", is dedicated "to my daughter, Leonora, without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time."

That is what the author would like to believe; actually, it takes just about so long to do stories as good as these. They cannot be hurried and P. G. knows it, hence the alibi. Besides, they are golf stories, that is to say, one alibi right after another, and Mr. Wodehouse admits in a remarkable preface that although his style owes something to Dostoyevsky, he has not really been suffering from the spell of the great Russians, but from desperate and dreadful attempts on the links near Southampton, Long Island, New York, U. S. A.

When funnier stories are written Wodehouse will write them.

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THE WORST of the feast is that it all lies before me. Mr. Doran must learn to serve his books in courses. "Revolt in the Desert," by Lawrence of Arabia, is of such importance and fascination that I cannot defer its discussion. The curious history of this book has been the subject of news dispatches and editorial articles for some weeks past. Lawrence wrote a tremendous work, — 400,000 words — and saw it stolen in a railway station. He then rewrote it from memory — most of his notes being lost also — and still had a length sufficient for a long Dickens novel. From this in five rescensions was extracted a quintessence which is the present book. It was originally never intended that the work should have general publication. There is no reason, however, why the world should be

kept from the thrilling pleasure of this condensed narrative of adventure, intrigue, hardship and as much romance as has visited any man of our century. You know who Lawrence is — the British officer sent out to consort with, advise, and possibly lead the Arabs in rebellion against Turkish authority with the purpose of thus contributing to the direct campaign by Allenby in Palestine. And for a long time, in Lawrence's phrase, the Arab Movement was only "a wild man's show." He might, modesty aside, have added that it was a one-man show. The characteristic of "Revolt in the Desert" is that it marches, as the French would say. Owing no doubt to the condensation, the march is usually at the double-quick.

It seems natural to slip from Lawrence's book of the desert to Pauline Smith's novel of the South African plains. Both deal with the primitive and the austere and both have the quality of intense spiritual adventure. Pauline Smith is the young woman whom Arnold Bennett used to speak of as "Pauline Smith, the novelist." When a question would be asked about her novels, Bennett would answer: "They will come." Her first work was "The Little Karoo," but this new book, "The Beadle", is her first full length novel. Reading its tender and poignant pages, one is left in no doubt that Mr. Bennett knew what he was saying. Here is a gentle girl, daughter of the gay young Klaartje and an unknown father. Love comes to Andrina in her innocence, takes her, does things to her and to those who hold her dear. Particularly to one man; and the effect of a genuine and simple religious faith upon the nature of such a man is one of the great effects of the book.

... "Thou glorious ancient smell of the theatre, thou sublime potpourri of grease-paint, wig-paste, vaseline, powder, perspiration, old clothes, oranges, tobacco, gas, drains, hair, whitewash, hot metal, and dusty canvas, where mayest thou still be savored?" The plaintive question pops out of a page of Compton Mackenzie's new novel, "Rogues and Vagabonds," and I find it irresistible because it so evidently is the book's own source. For the author of "Carnival" has always been fascinated by play-actors, knows them through and through, and was bound to

write more about them. He has gone back through a century this time to begin with a maker of fireworks and an Italian performer, or rather with her spirited daughter, Letizia.

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CRIME this month comes to us in the form of an unusual biography. Perhaps I should not use the word "biography" at all. Sir Richard Muir was senior counsel to the British Treasury and one of the three most famous prosecutors in England. His life has been written by the brilliant method of describing the dozens of cases he handled. "Famous Criminals and Their Trials" is, therefore, compiled from Sir Richard Muir's papers, written by Sidney Theodore D. Felstead and edited by Lady Muir. Horatio Bottomley, the Yarmouth Beach murder, Whitaker Wright the swindler, Steinie Morrison's trial for the killing of Leon Beron, the Brixton taxicab robbery, the Hatton Garden pearl theft, Lord Alfred Douglas, Ignatius Lincoln's treason — why any resume of the contents must inevitably sound like a list of detective stories by J. S. Fletcher or a series of new adventures by Sherlock Holmes. Probably the case most widely known to Americans is the prosecution of Dr. Crippen, which Muir conducted, and the most fascinating thing in the whole of this fascinating book is the page upon page reproduction of Muir's highly condensed notes on the case, the notes which he used in the trial and which sent Crippen to his execution.

It is easy to pass from the crime of fact to the crime of imagination where the imaginative effort is so close to fact as it is in the play, "Broadway," by Philip Dunning and George Abbott. I have spoken of "Broadway," the text of the year's most popular play published in book form, before this. And always something has happened to postpone publication. But this time you are not to be fooled, by whatever innocent accident; the book is actually ready. I have held a copy in my hands. It is a play you will read though you be one of those who "never read plays". Because you must know about it, and you will be lucky indeed if you get inside the theatre for some time to come. . . .

And speaking of the theatre — it was back in 1920 when Dan Totheroh's play, "Wild