

Two Celtic Biographies

Memories and Adventures, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. \$4.50.

The London Adventure, by Arthur Machen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.00.

THESE two recorders of adventure are frequenters of the penumbra, traffickers in the cryptic and the occult. Both, properly enough, are Celts, Sir Conan being an Irishman and Machen a Welshman. Both, with equal propriety, rest their shadowy interests on the tangible, physical basis which is provided by professional life: Doyle relates the early hardships of a surgeon, and Machen records the indignities that were heaped upon him, too far beyond his youthful years, during journalistic experiences in Fleet Street. But beyond these points in common, differences develop; and Machen is the one who emphasizes them.

Sir Conan, having lived a full life in the world of men, with contacts numerous and with reminiscences as varied as comprehensive, endeavors to postpone his well-known psychic interests until his final chapter; but his "allegiance to the unseen" obtrudes on page 27, crops up at short intervals throughout, and is proclaimed, toward the end of the volume, to have come to absorb the whole energy of his life. But Machen, from the start, abandons himself to commerce with mystery, coincidence, evil and dread; and when mystery itself seems to weaken and fail, mystification is brought forward to take its place. He is satisfied with the atmosphere in which he finds—or has set—himself, and with the sinister oddities (often enough unwholesome) which that atmosphere yields. He is therefore impatient with the oddities of other men: with "pantomime-chorus fairies on photographic plates;" with the "amiable Conandoylery that is now in such fashion in certain quarters;" and with the sipping of "those synthetic whiskies-and-sodas . . . by the gates of the New Jerusalem." Sir Conan's book contains nothing in this temper. Perhaps here we may mark the difference between a success reached in due season and a success too long deferred.

Mr. Machen's little book—it has but 170 pages—calls to mind the versifier who sat him down to discourse on the composition of a sonnet: a line of recognition for the historic form, a second on the selection of a suitable theme, another indicative of the proper handling of the material, a fourth on the difficulty of achieved rhyme, and so on, until at the end of fourteen lines, the sonnet itself stood complete. "So I," as Machen remarks. He was reminded, while taking his ease in an obscure tavern of the Great Town, that he had promised to begin a book to be called *The London Adventure* as soon as "the leaves should begin to come out." The leaves come out for the trees faster than they did for the book: through several chapters there are impediments, postponements, divagations and varying phases of reluctance; yet in time the end is reached and *The London Adventure* stands accomplished. Of course what this essay means—following the explicit declaration in its earliest chapter—is this: "It is possible . . . that the real pattern and scheme of life is not in the least apparent on the outward surface of things, . . . but rather lurks, half-hidden, only apparent in certain rare lights, and then only to the prepared eye; a secret pattern, an ornament which

seems to have but little relation or none at all to the obvious scheme of the universe." Though the book gets under way slowly, it grows better as it proceeds: let no one who is approaching this unique author for the first time give him up too soon. It is the reader already habituated who will perhaps sense the overworking of familiar motifs, and will feel that the author has begun to live on his own fat. Many pages drawn from note books give outline sketches of characteristic stories that have been written or remain unwritten: in either case they neither impede the flow of "long-gathered material for a sermon on the great text that there is wonder in everything and everywhere"—even if it leads the human spirit "into momentary contact with worlds which it is not meant to visit."

Doyle too becomes, in a measure, the victim of his past—at least to the extent that the jacket of his book bears a facsimile of the particular manuscript page which was the first to receive the immortal cognomen of "Holmes." It has long been suspected that the creator of the prince of modern detectives got little pleasure out of references to this manifestation of his handiwork; consequently one is not surprised by such a categorical declaration as this: "I believe that if I had never touched Holmes, who has tended to obscure my higher work, my position in literature would at the present moment be a more commanding one." A word, perhaps, for *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel*. Or, possibly, for *The New Revelation* and the *Wanderings of a Spiritualist*—since why need it surprise us if one whose eye is now fixed almost exclusively on the mysteries and promises of the Beyond should be inclined to minimize the earthy details of commonplace crime, however acute the mentality involved in its detection?

Machen shrinks back into the shadow, even when the sun is shining and all the leaves are green; but a good part of Doyle's crowded volume transacts itself in the open light of day. There are his travels in the Arctic regions and along the West African coast; there are activities among the Boers and the Egyptians and on the Allied fronts during the Great War; there are easy and intimate encounters with multitudinous celebrities, political and literary, both at home and abroad; and there is an elaborate chapter on Sport. We end by voting so active a man—despite the concerns at present engaging him—as "a regular fellow." Machen, on the other hand, chained to his dusky doorsteps, is the very special fellow who has an uncomfortable time in this life, yet is fairly sure of a very special niche among us after having left this life behind.

HENRY B. FULLER.

Missouri Realism

R. F. D. No. 3, by Homer Croy. New York: Harper and Brothers. \$2.00.

A YEAR ago Homer Croy surprised those persons who knew him (if at all) as a professional humorist, by writing *West of the Water Tower*, an excellent, serious novel of small town life in Missouri. His new book is a venture in the same field. If it lacks a little of the freshness and vigor of the earlier work, it is still a robust, competent piece of writing which does not suffer by comparison with any other product of what has come

to be the most extensive school of novelists in the country: those who reveal and disparage life as lived in mid-continent. West of the Water Tower was the story of a young man in a small town; R. F. D. No. 3 tells what happened in a year of the life of a farm girl. Josie Decker is a half educated, good-looking young woman, dissatisfied with the life on her shiftless father's farm, yet beating her wings in vain, ignorant of means of escape, and unable to use them if she had known them. She studies "fancy dancing," gets third prize in a beauty contest, nearly marries a young farmer of the neighborhood, and then suddenly elopes with a handsome city feller, salesman for a patent silo. Because of a series of accidents, the elopement is not followed by the formality of marriage; and after they have been living together for a week or so, the boy is arrested on the charge (of which he is guilty) of automobile stealing. The girl goes home to her parents, confesses the truth and presently has to add the admission that she is pregnant. From her dilemma she is rescued by marriage with another neighboring farmer, "Bush" Higbee, a rough and brutal Napoleon of the prairie, whose uncouthness is supposed to be compensated by his honest candor and innate fairness. Having long loved Josie, and having seen her snatched from him by the silo salesman, he is glad to take her despite the coming baby.

This synopsis, as unfair as such things always are, may serve at least to indicate the intellectual honesty of Mr. Croy's narrative. He has not prettified his Missouri. In fact, if he errs at all it is in the other direction: the poverty, sordidness, misery of the Decker household are rubbed in until the reader marvels, not that a million farmers move to town each year, but that there are any rural remnants at all. Against this background his characters are sharply and vividly drawn; the girl Josie, her failure father, Higbee the rough diamond, are persons it is hard to forget. If the book adds little to the knowledge of the rural scene which has been imparted by other writers and by Mr. Croy in his own previous work, it is a truthful and competent piece of writing, a credit to its author's desire to make an honest picture of a life which he himself evidently views with some repugnance.

B. B.

Julie Cane

Julie Cane, by Harvey O'Higgins. New York: Harper and Brothers. \$2.00.

IT is no disparagement to the rest of Mr. O'Higgins's novel to say that the opening chapters are about as good as the opening chapters of a middle-weight novel could be. Arnold Bennett himself could not have put the color of human notions, emotions and absurdities more happily into a drab setting. The author presents Cane, a sallow unsuccessful grocer of Findellen, New Jersey. But he presents him merely to contend that all things are possible, for with a practised pen, which has yet the relish of first attempt, he plumbs the unlikely speculative spaces of Cane, and shows you the real man, the interior man, Cane the philosopher, the thinker, who reads Darwin while his wife complains from bed, who views the universe "scientifically" and holds the negligible human race in scorn. On Cane the genial early chapters dwell because it was he who gave Julie, his daugh-

ter, her notion of herself, who made her what she was, in other words, since for all practical purposes of life people are what they are to themselves. "You're all right Julie," he would say.

. . . You'll get lots o' lickings in this world for things you never did . . . It's only the boobies who expect justice the way things are . . . Don't let 'em scare you. That's all . . . Your mind's your own. It's the one thing you've got to protect yourself with an' it's the one thing they'll do their best to get away from you . . .

Of course Julie understood that her father by sheer force of mind had raised himself and her above the herdish stupidities of "them." They were animals who used their instincts, not their brains.

Emerging from her "ivory tower of silence" above the grocery shop, Julie took her opinion of herself into the world (via Miss Perrin's school), and the world, mystified and put off, confirmed her in it. She found unreasonable things happening. But her father had told her that unreasonable things always happened. She was not surprised.

With the introduction of Allan Birdsall and his mother and the Misses Perrin, the book takes a more serious turn towards what is called a psychological novel. But it has none of the conscientious dreariness of what is called that. It is psychologically convincing without being psychologically self-conscious. The spinster Martha Perrin, with her trembling passion for Julie, is a precarious study; Allan Birdsall, especially in his devious unhealthy adolescence, is a daring one. But Mr. O'Higgins has a sense of humor and a sense of proportion; he has swallowed his psychology and digested it; it reappears firm and well-mastered in his credible characters.

The product of all the moods and motives of the book is Julie, of course. She moves from one situation to another with her mouth shut, for the most part, seldom revealing her mind but always keeping to it. She transcends, as the other characters do not quite, her author and his psychology. Even Mr. O'Higgins does not always seem to know the depths of her young reticence. He has written an accomplished first novel, with humor, lucidity and feeling; but more than that, he has created a heroine.

E. V.

Policies and Policies in Asia

Conflict of Policies in Asia, by Thomas F. Millard. New York: Century Company. \$4.00.

THE American policy of assisting Asiatic peoples to fit themselves for self-government and independence and the European policy—which is to say, British, policy—of repressing them in order that accidental exploitation may be easier and more profitable—there lies the conflict as Mr. Millard sees it. His thesis is that the American policy must be established and maintained, by accommodation with Great Britain if possible and by force through our newly acquired strength if necessary.

There, indeed, the conflict lies, and Mr. Millard has accurately posed the problem of the relation of the white powers to the Asiatic peoples. But I am not so sure that Mr. Millard's premises of American purity are still valid in the light of recent tendencies. Our record in the East has in truth been singularly clean, but it may have been