

Books and Bookmen

This, My Son: Rene Bazin. (London: George Bell and Sons).

If the entente cordiale had done no more for England than to give her reading public translations of those two great masters of style, M. Rene Bazin and M. Anatole France, it has not been fruitless. That Dr. A. S. Rappoport, assisted by Miss M. Edwards, has been responsible for the translation of "This, My Son," is sufficient guarantee of its excellence. The book's theme is similar to that of the "Prodigal Son," except that, instead of M. Rene Bazin's prodigal repenting of his folly, and returning home to ask his father's forgiveness, his parent goes to Paris to seek him, finds him half demented in an absinthe den, from which he is rescued, only to reach home and die. We have so often dilated on M. Rene Bazin's incomparably chaste style that we can add nothing further to our appreciation of it, except to say that if any thing, "This, my Son," exceeds in pathos, interest and realism any of the three books that have preceded it. Every book-lover should buy and read it, and acquaint himself with M. Rene Bazin as a writer of genius, a man of profound knowledge, and sympathy, and the coming Saviour of a regenerated France. We are indebted to Messrs. Willman and Avey for our copy of a book which we place on the same shelf as our Bible and the greatest of poets.

Some Ladies in Haste: Robert W. Chambers. (London: Archibald Constable and Co., Ltd.).

It would almost seem as though Mr. Chambers felt the strain of writing his greater books and endeavoured to seek relaxation by sandwiching a lighter one in between. Not that "Some Ladies in Haste" is indifferent fare, but it differs from his more epicurean dishes much as the roe of a good Yarmouth bloater differs from the finest Russian caviare, and, like the roe of a bloater, is more easy of assimilation and digestion. In this vastly entertaining story Mr. Chambers seeks to show his readers the dangers that lurk in the application of the modern science called mental suggestion. Fortunately, out of compassion for the nerves of his readers, Mr. Chambers has chosen to make comic happenings rather than tragic occur to the ten subjects he experiments upon.

We do not propose to detail the extraordinary doings and goings on of the five ladies and five gentlemen who constitute the dramatic personae of this farcical story, but for the benefit of the sentimental readers who will have begun to scent love-making, and perhaps a little scandal in the title, we will give the story away so far as to tell them that the five ladies and the five gentlemen, after coming again into possession of their right minds, marry and live happy ever after. And we strongly advise all believers and experimenters in mental suggestion to read this book, if only to show them that mental suggestion, like electricity, is a very queer thing if it gets out of hand. For instance, one of Mr. Chambers' currents got astray, and he fears that it was intercepted and divided equally between the Kaiser and Mr. Roosevelt, which, according to Mr. Chambers' own accounts for their erratic utterances and proceedings.

It is a long time since a book so full of spontaneous humour and ingenious conception came into our hands for review, and it has fully compensated us for much that has been both dry and hackneyed.

The Conventionalists: Robert Hugh Benson. (London: Hutchinson and Co., Paternoster Row.)

We have no bias against Mr. R. H. Benson, because he is a Roman Catholic, as we believe in religious toleration, but we think it an abuse of privilege to use the pages of a novel for the purpose of proselyting. Had the Protestant Church amongst its safeguards an Index Librorum Prohibitorum, "The Conventional-

ists" would be placed on it, so dangerously persuasive, so insidiously and so seemingly fairly is it written. If to lead the life that, being human, is necessitous to the working-out of the destinies of humanity, in the aggregate, be conventional, we are glad to be numbered in the ranks of the conventionalists. For the "Contemplative" places himself outside of the pale of humanity, and we cannot think that any sane or healthy human could do this unless he were, like the Algy Banister of this book, subjected to very severe outside pressure. The virtue of a Contemplative would seem to us to be a purely negative virtue, and surely a man can walk as closely with his Maker, in his natural sphere, as out of it, though we concede that his way may be more get about with difficulty. And we would remind Mr. Benson that Algy Banister might have won his crown as a martyr (if martyrdom was the road he felt he must travel in order to find his soul) along the lines of convention and with less hurt to his fellows.

Though we hear a great deal from Mr. Benson about Algy Banister's duty to himself, he entirely omits any mention of his pervert's duty to his parents, a duty that had been intensified by his brother Harold's death; or his duty towards Mary Maple, whom he had pretended to love; or his inherited duty towards his numerous dependents; or his duty towards his King and country. The contemplative life, with all that makes human life sweet and wholesome, and tolerable, left out of it; in its place a life in which utter loneliness, useless introspection, scourgings, semi-starvation, weariness of body and spirit, alternated by hysteric upliftings, lastly oblivion and the very questionable prospect of reaching the goal aimed at—for surely God is mocked by this travesty of sacrifice—is the life Mr. Benson would have us believe is most acceptable to God. That perversions of every law framed by humans are bound to occur, is undeniable. But in spite of Mr. Benson's farcical representation of conventionalism, we still believe and maintain that convention is one of society's strongest bulwarks instituted for the preservation of its weakest members.

DELTA.

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The Need for Ships.

(“The Bulletin.”)

Australia's fleet consists of a few obsolescent gunboats and one fifty-year-old battleship.—Disturbing fact.

Themistocles proposed that, instead of dividing amongst themselves the revenues derived from the silver mine at Laurium, they should use that fund for the construction of ships of war. With the fleet thus obtained, Greece was saved at the battle of Salamis.—Plutarch, abridged.

Broken Hill, one of the richest mineral-producing cities in the Commonwealth, has its biggest mines closed down.—News item.

Athens in the long ago—ere the Asiat.

Laid the Spartan legion low—drifted thus;

Wasted time in revelry, launched no ships upon the sea—

Drowsed long quite carelessly—

Same as us!

From her mines at Laurium, ere the Persian bent his drum,

Lo, she raised a mighty sum every year;

But that foolish hand afar threw its coin across the bar,

Bought with it the brown cigar,

Likewise beer!

But Themistocles, the wise, gazed with grim, prophetic eyes—

Whilst the crowd swapped jokes and lies; saw the need;

Fought the ancient Tory crew—fool Athenian leaders who

Saw no need for measures new—

(Cook and Reid)

And he beat them, so it seems—bright to-day his action gleams—

Built one hundred big trimmes speedily;

Aristides and his gang grieved to hear his hammer clang—

Yea, they felt the Tory pang inwardly!

Came King Xerxes, light the Proud, with his monstrous fighting crowd—

Blared his trumpets long and loud as they came;

On that ancient land at last burst the Asiatic blast,

And the Tories stood aghast

At the same!

With twelve hundred fighting ships came the Persian—neath his whips

Marched the millions—in eclipse sank the star

(So opined the Tory crew) of the land—that Homer knew—

Land of heroes brave and true

In times afar.

Some observed, "The best to run—Greece, it seems, is clearly done."

But their leader bade them shun such a crime;

"Here be ships wherewith to fight—grasp your swords," said he, "and smite;

Let us keep our country White—This land sublime!"

"Brave Leonidas is dead—yea, Thermopylae runs red

With the blood his heroes shed for his land;

Athens burns—our city dear; but our fighting ships are here,

Greece is safe—ye need no fear,

Let us stand!"

Blaring loud did echoes come—echoes of the Persian drum;

Crouched the Tories pale and numb on the shore,

But the man who nanned the fleet raised no wail of dread defeat—

Resolute each seaman beat

With his oar!

Where the Isle of Salamis lifts, the lips of Greece to kiss,

Lo, they made their galley his through the swell;

Xerxes proud, upon his throne, thought the victory his own;

Soon he raised a bitter groan,

Then a yell!

For behold! with iron beaks drove the warships of the Greeks—

The Athenian proudly speaks of that day;

Shining yet across the years, see their swords, their shields and spears,

Hear the ringing Grecian cheers

Far away!

Turned the Persian ships and fled—in the sea their floating dead

Dyed the blue Aegean red with their blood;

Xerxes proud in anguish rose, quit his large, all-conquering pose,

For his name, as history shows, Was Plain Mud!

He who came two millions strong tore with whirlwind speed along—

Came no glad, triumphant song from his lips;

Thus Themistocles the grim, in those days long dead and dim,

Spoilt the Asiatic hymn

With his ships!



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