

BOOK AND JOURNAL REVIEWS.

"In My Youth." Who wrote it? Who is the author of the fascinating volume entitled "In My Youth"? Evidently the publishers are sworn to secrecy, if they know. It is the portrayal of life in Indiana sixty years ago, and is published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company. The author shrouds his identity in the name Robert Dudley. This book was discussed by several litterateurs present at a dinner given by Dr. and Mrs. W. W. Vinnedge, September 24, which was during the time of the State medical meeting at Lafayette. This discussion abounded in freshness from the fact that it was the evening of the day the book was said to be released. A synopsis of the narrative was given by one of those present, and another guest was impressed that the author was an Indiana man and that the scene was laid not a hundred miles from Muncie. I have not read the book, but I surmise that the exposition which I heard was clear and accurate. I am convinced that Dr. G. W. H. Kemper could write just such a book, but he says, "No." This journal has frequently published some of the thoughts expressed by Mr. Howland in the editorial columns of the Indianapolis News, and we take from the Indianapolis Star of September 27 his graphic description of the mystery of "In My Youth":

In September a year ago the following letter was received by Hewitt H. Howland, editor of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, the letter being given in full with the exception of the signature of the agent:

"Gentlemen—Some time ago I came into possession of a manuscript which, on account of its local interest (and general interest, too), as well as its peculiar literary quality, will, I believe, make a strong appeal to you as publishers. I have revised and edited it throughout, and am having a clean typewritten copy made, which is now almost finished. The work is autobiographical—reminiscent of life under peculiar conditions in Indiana sixty or seventy years ago—but it is an

autobiography of a kind quite different from the ordinary.

"The author was the writer, in his day, of more than one successful book, but in this book he has taken the reader so unreservedly into his confidence that it was his wish that his true name should not be disclosed, lest it bring embarrassment to his family. He has written, therefore, under an assumed name, and the manuscript will be submitted for examination only upon condition that his identity shall not be disclosed. So far as I have been able to discover, not more than two persons now living are anywhere mentioned in the narrative, and there is absolutely nothing written that would hurt the feelings of any one.

"I can send you about 500 of the 570 pages (more or less) immediately, and the balance quite soon. Would you like to examine it under the condition above mentioned, and shall I send it to you at once?"

Investigation showed that the agent was acting in good faith, and the manuscript was accepted. In less than a month it was on its way to Indianapolis, accompanied by the following message:

"By express today I am sending you the manuscript of a work entitled 'In My Youth. From the Posthumous Papers of Robert Dudley.' This is the manuscript of which I wrote you a few weeks ago, and I submit it for examination with a view to its early publication. No other publisher has seen it.

"The work will speak for itself; and whatever may be your opinion of its literary quality or its marketable value, I am sure you will agree that, as an autobiography, it is decidedly different.

"Of course, it is understood, for the reasons mentioned in my former letter, the identity of 'Robert Dudley' must not be revealed or inquired into.

"In acknowledging the receipt of the manuscript, will you kindly state the approximate date at which you will probably be able to report upon it?"

"It is difficult to describe just what

there is so remarkable about the book," said Mr. Howland, "but it undeniably is wonderful. It is literature. It is a strange combination of autobiography and fiction, and records only the simplest happenings—the life of people in the Indiana backwoods, the primitive life, the commonplace experiences, the visits between neighbors. To tell about it in this way does not make it sound remarkable, yet it is.

"The style is simple and clear; there is a quiet humor running through it, and in other places the reading brings tears to the eyes.

"I do not recognize the style as that of any living author with whose writings I am familiar, and I can not think of any of the writers of a generation or two ago with whom to compare it."

As to where the scene is laid—that, also, is another puzzle. The publishing company has sent out 100 advance copies to prominent persons in Indiana, and has received many letters concerning it. Nearly all of these letters contain the statement that the writer has solved, at least, if not the identity of the author, the scene of the story. The scene has been located at Plainfield and Richmond; one person asserts the scenes can be nowhere in Indiana but in the vicinity of Danville; another insists that he recognizes actual descriptions of the country about Centerville.

Aside from its value as a work of quasi-fiction, the book has an immense historical value. It gives glimpses and sidelights into the early life in Indiana that could not be obtained from any history of the State.

It is, of course, of especial interest to Indiana readers, but will prove fascinating reading to people of any locality. Most fascinating of all is the mystery surrounding the identity of the author.

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