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"Swan's Milk," by Louis Marlow; London, Faber and Faber.

Mr. Louis Marlow writes of his imaginary Johnson with a truly Boswellian enthusiasm. Once one has overcome the slight sense of shock consequent upon reading a description of the hero's appearance "A strangely beautiful youth, all greens and golds and scarlets, entirely inhuman, his green and russet hair of unusual length and abnormally thick, his eyebrows dense, and his lips scarlet," all is plain sailing. Perhaps plainer sailing when college years are left behind. Such a piece of exoticism as young Dexter hardly bears the closest scrutiny when surrounded by other effete young men at the close of the wilder era, when Beardsley was their artist, and Frank Harris and Oscar Browning ruling personalities. There are many pages devoted to a subtle questioning of the eternal verities. It is all very interesting to the adolescent mind, it has all been done before, quite as well as in "Swan's Milk," and somehow one would prefer the more customary brand of nourishment, say that of the domestic cow.

But this is not all the book, many are the fine vignettes of notable men. Maugham, Thomas Hardy, Meredith, and Powys among others. The America of those days before the war is frequently denounced: "The American has no sense of the common basic human dignity or reserve. The train conductors stick your ticket into your hat band."

Mr. Marlow has used a difficult form in this biographical autobiographical work. He will undoubtedly be accused of having too many irons in the fire. One would think that the life history of Dexter, the clever presentations of those great literary men with whom he came in contact, several imaginary portraits, and a candid account of a growing moral liberty, not to mention a lecture tour in America would make a fine dish to set before the public.

Unfortunately the concoction is a thought too highly seasoned. The redeeming feature is a certain naïve humor, as when Theodore Dreiser, puzzled at the loss for a word for the young of swans, appeals to Aleister Crowley: "What is it? What would you call a young swan?" And his look, more puzzled still and more resentfully defensive, when Crowley replied: "Why not call him Alfred?"