

**CONRAD IN QUEST
OF HIS YOUTH**

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Conrad in quest of his youth by Leonard Merrick

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LEONARD MERRICK

**CONRAD IN QUEST
OF HIS YOUTH**

THE WORKS OF LEONARD MERRICK

CONRAD · IN · QUEST
· OF · HIS · YOUTH

*An
Extravagance of Temperament*



The Works of
LEONARD MERRICK

WHILE PARIS LAUGHED. Being Pranks and
Passions of the Poet Tricotrin.

CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH.
With an Introduction by SIR J. M. BARRIE.

**WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE
WINDOW.** With an Introduction by SIR
WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL.

THE POSITION OF PEGGY HARPER.
With an Introduction by SIR ARTHUR PINERO.

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN
and other Stories. With an Introduction by W. J.
LOCKE.

THE WORLDLINGS. With an Introduction by
NEIL MUNRO.

THE ACTOR-MANAGER. With an Introduction
by W. D. HOWELLS.

CYNTHIA. With an Introduction by MAURICE
HEWLETT.

THE QUAIN COMPANIONS. With an Intro-
duction by H. G. WELLS.

ONE MAN'S VIEW. With an Introduction by
GRANVILLE BARKER.

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD. With an Intro-
duction by J. K. PROTHERO.

A CHAIR ON THE BOULEVARD. With an
Introduction by A. NEIL LYONS.

THE HOUSE OF LYNCH. With an Intro-
duction by G. K. CHESTERTON.

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CONRAD IN QUEST
OF HIS YOUTH
BY LEONARD MERRICK
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
J.M. BARRIE



HODDER & STOUGHTON

LIMITED

LONDON



INTRODUCTION

A DISQUIETING sentimental journey would be down the obituary column of *The Times* in search of novel-readers who have gone and died without ever knowing of the sentimental quest of Conrad. They would be the great majority, it seems, and we may drop a sigh for them or a "Serve you right," according to their opportunities. Incomplete lives.

It is from such reflections by a number of Mr. Merrick's fellow-writers that this edition of his books has sprung, of which *Conrad in Quest of His Youth* is the first volume. Disagreeing among themselves on most matters, probably even on the value of each other to the State, they are agreed on this, that Mr. Merrick is one of the flowers of their calling; and they have, perhaps, an uneasy feeling that if the public will not take his works to their heart there must be something wrong with the popularity of their own. "Unless you like Merrick also, please not to like me." Or we may put it more benignantly in this way, that

as you, the gentle reader, have been good to us, we want to be good to you, and so we present to you, with our compliments, just about the best thing we have got—an edition of Mr. Merrick's novels. There have been many "author's editions," but never, so far as I know, one quite like this, in which the "author" is not the writer himself but his contemporaries, who have entirely "engineered" the edition themselves and have fallen over each other, so to speak, in their desire to join in the honour of writing the prefaces. Such is the unique esteem in which Mr. Merrick is held by his fellow-workers. For long he has been the novelists' novelist, and we give you again the chance to share him with us; you have been slow to take the previous chances, and you may turn away again, but in any case he will still remain our man.

I speak, of course, only for myself, but there is no doubt to my mind that *Conrad in Quest of His Youth* is the best sentimental journey that has been written in this country since the publication of the other one; so gay it is, so sad, of such an alluring spirit, so fine a temper. I know scarcely a novel by any living Englishman except a score or so of Mr. Hardy's, that I would rather have written. I am not certain,

however, had the attractive choice been given me, that I would not first have "knocked off" some of Mr. Merrick's short stories—particularly the Parisian ones—to make sure of my future, in case a street accident, say, should end me abruptly. In some of the other books the women, at least, are more elaborately drawn, and there is a grimmer contact with life—Mr. Merrick with his coat off—but if, like the shipwrecked lady in a horrible tale, I were given a moment to decide which of my children I should save, I would on the whole keep grip of Conrad and the short stories, and let the other babies go. Several other authors would, I am sure, see to it that while they themselves floated, *The Quaint Companions* did not sink, and I can picture Mr. Howells diving recklessly after *The Actor-Manager*.

Of my free will nothing would induce me to give away the story of *Conrad in Quest of His Youth* to those who are about to read it for the first time. I have just re-read it, and it is as fresh as yesterday's shower; time, I am sure, is not going to dim it; it does effectually what we should all have liked to try to do with it had we wakened some glad morn with the idea. No one need ever seek to do it again. We must all henceforth try something

else. And yet it has been in existence for many years and comparatively few people know of it. The libraries might issue it to the readers of six a week as fresh from the press, with a fair chance of not being found out. The same might be said of Mr. Hudson's *The Purple Land*, another of the choicest things of our latter-day literature. Yet the public does not back away from all good things even when the maker is alive; what makes it so shy of these?

I have heard Mr. Merrick called a pessimist, and readers are not prepared, as a rule, to spend joyous hours with pessimists. But compared to many of his contemporaries he is quite a gay dog, laughter shining constantly in his pages with a fine serenity; instead of setting forth to make his characters miserable he is so much in sympathy with them that I can think of no novelist who spends more time—it is almost divertingly obvious—in seeking a happy way out for them. It is as if he were fighting for some comfort for himself, as no doubt he is. He is not always successful, the stern artist in him forbidding, but never were characters who, if they go hopelessly wrong, have brought it more certainly on themselves. The author is ever nudging them in the right direction,