

"GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES."

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." By Anita Loos. (Brentano's. 7s. 6d.)

(BY ROSE MACAULAY.)

This is probably the funniest book that has appeared in either England or America since "The Young Visitors." And it is funny in rather the same way. Both are the supposed product of uneducated intelligences; each is written in an idiom of naive and intriguing imbecility; finally, each is so packed with phrases and paragraphs delightful to quote, that the reviewer is tempted to make his notice of the book little more than a string of these. Remembering how, to some extent, the first reading of "The Young Visitors" was marred by these well-meaning quoters, from Sir James Barrie onwards, and foreseeing that most reviewers of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" will be impelled to similar activities, I will try to forbear, but shall probably not succeed, since from every page sentences leap to the eye so agreeable in their smug, illiterate complacency, or their feckless good spirits, or their unconscious turn of epigram, that it is as difficult to refrain from mentioning them as it is not to turn to one's companion for sympathy at an amusing play.

Miss (or is it Mrs.?) Loos has done her work with great enjoyment and great skill. She has caught to the life the repetitive, illiterate, slatternly, would-be genteel style of her cheerful diarist, who links each sentence to the next with "I mean," or "So." Whether she had a model for any part of this diary, or whether it is all the work of her creative and intuitive intelligence, is not revealed. What it suggests is a model which has been improved on. It is too good to be entirely natural. It gains in wit what it perforce loses in verisimilitude. The real young woman would not emit so many and such good epigrams about life, literature, and gentlemen. Her definition of a "salo," her concise description of the books of a gentleman called Mr. Conrad, her account of her gentleman novelist friend's idea of a good wife ("Gerry does not like a girl to be nothing but a doll, but he likes her to bring in her husband's slippers every evening and make him forget what he has gone through"), her description of Mr. Spoffard, the Presbyterian gentleman who loved to reform people and to senshure everything, and who really came over to Europe to look at all the things that Americans come over to Europe to look at, when they really should not look at them, but they should look at all of the museums instead, because if that is all we Americans come to Europe to look at we should stay home and look at America first (I am sorry, but the author's own words were here necessary); her interview with Dr. Froyd in Vienna, her innocent question to the Prince of Wales concerning horses, her application of Christian science to the terrible memory of having spent a day going through all of the museums in Munchen, and, in fact, the majority of her crisp commentary, are altogether too bright and good for the slipshod pen which is supposed to produce them.

The real thing, one feels, would be funny, but not so funny. What is entirely and illuminately accurate is the attitude of the diarist towards herself and her own adventures. She regards herself as a very respectable and refined girl, and alludes to "girls who are not nice," and girls who are not the kind of girl that ever meets gentlemen's mothers, with lofty and righteous fastidiousness. How much truer to life is this tone than the "I'm not respectable" pose of the usual fictional ladies of the same profession. What, I wonder, is thought of it by the other "girls like I" who read it, if any of them do? Anyhow it is certain that to the ordinary reader it will seem extremely funny. The wit of the text is enhanced by that of Mr. Ralph Barton's illustrations. A clever and delightful entertainment.