

WITHOUT OFFENSE TO THE MORALISTS.

A short time ago there appeared on the American literary scene a new story. It was first published serially in a woman's magazine and its title told the world that one Anita Loos, heretofore known as a scenario writer, had discovered that "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." The story's next appearance was in book form and no one except the publisher knows just how many thousands of copies have been sold to date. Book stores pile their supply of the small volume like cordwood, and the piles disappear as fast as they are erected. Lately, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" has appeared at a Chicago theater in play form and has achieved a notable success. A movie version is promised.

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is a sign of the times. Divested of its originality and humor, it is nothing else than the story of two young prostitutes. The reader is regaled with the adventures of a wholly ruthless pair of gold-diggers. One learns that no girl—provided she has a little beauty, a dash of style, a spice of intelligence, no concern over her reputation, and above all is possessed of an uncritical friendliness—need worry about getting along in the world.

It is doubtful whether a book so frankly insinuating could have succeeded before the war. It lacks even the stereotyped subterfuges with which the usual sex appeal literature covers up its pornographic. There is no attempt to camouflage sin beneath a layer of sentimental treacle.

It pretends to no artistic merit as does the book of the neorealistic school with its brothel plot and its bawdy theme of subconscious complexes released. Its sins are not venerated as are the peccancies of the haut monde in the society novel. The forerunners of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" had at least the virtue of casting their Magdalenes into the gutter in the final chapter. Miss Loos' book pretends to not even that degree of respectability. Her heroine, following a three day orgy of drink and license, marries Henry and is sure "everything always turns out for the best."

That such a book has been able to attain such widespread popularity is a matter not for literary but for moral speculation. It is a reflection, perhaps, of a changed moral attitude brought about, paradoxically, by the reform wave which closed up the red light districts and sent their inhabitants abroad to live in the apartment next door. It indicates a changed era in which, with the old classification of women into two groups—"good" and "bad"—abandoned, society is willing that all lines of demarcation should be allowed to fade out. Strangely enough, the popularity of Miss Loos' book is not all man-made. Women buy the volume eagerly.

Were it not for the fact that "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is strictly an attempt at entertainment and does not touch upon things political or religious, or questions of morals as such, it would have been denounced from the pulpits and barred from the malls long ago.

It is strange that the reform element has not found out Miss Loos' book before this. It is excellent ammunition for their charge that the present age is one of loosened morals and libidinous instincts.

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is a sign of the times. As a finger post in social history it ranks

with the habit of certain rich American girls of casting off the titled foreign husband of a week as men of another generation discarded a tiresome mistress.