

[*The Bookman*]

SIR PHILIP GIBBS

BY FREDERIC WHYTE

DURING all the twenty years of our intimate acquaintance I have never been able to think of Philip Gibbs without thinking also of David Copperfield. Even now as a man of forty, with his remarkably youthful countenance, he would still look David Copperfield to the life, if only he wore his hair a little longer, and his trousers a little tighter. There is a great deal of David in his character, no less than in his personal appearance — in his grave simplicity, his unobtrusive humor, his depth of feeling, his wide sympathies, his keenly observant interest in everything, human nature most of all. And then, into the bargain, there is his literary and journalistic career. Had David Copperfield gone forth as a 'War Special' who can doubt but that his record would have been just such as the record of Philip Gibbs? Incidentally, he would doubtless have become 'Sir David.' I like to picture Mr. Wilkins Micawber inditing a letter of congratulation to the young friend whom he can never again address as 'My dear Copperfield.'

It was on a spot hallowed by memories, not indeed of David Copperfield and Mr. Micawber, but of their creator that Philip Gibbs and I first met — at La Belle Sauvage Yard, Ludgate Hill, the site of one of the celebrated old coaching inns of London, now for two score years and more the centre from which the multifarious publications of Cassell & Co. radiate over the British Empire. Young Philip, whose father was an inspector of schools, had re-

cently joined Cassell & Co.'s editorial staff as assistant to the manager of their Education Department, Mr. H. O. Arnold-Forster, M.P., a very serious and strenuous man, and something of a celebrity in the world of politics. The twenty-year-old new-comer put his back into the work and soon made himself quite an educational expert; but a better opening which offered elsewhere put an early end to this stage in his career.

The better opening was that of editor of Tillotson's Fiction Bureau at Bolton, in Lancashire. Here, also, he made his mark. As a change from the countless novels and short stories which it was his business to procure for those wholesale literary purveyors, he introduced a curiously interesting new 'feature' of his own, under the effective title, 'Knowledge is Power' — a miscellany of extracts from all kinds of books, with a running commentary by himself, and original contributions from chance correspondents, famous or obscure. It was a huge success. That gift of sympathy which was to be so great a factor in his achievements as a war correspondent now revealed itself and brought him all kinds of communications — thousands of them — from all corners of the globe. I doubt whether anybody in England, except Mr. Stead of the *Review of Reviews*, had so wonderful a letter bag.

But Bolton is a dismal hole, and Philip Gibbs and his young wife — whom he had married in his teens — longed again for London. So we find

him installed, presently, at Carmelite House on the staff of the *Daily Mail*. After the *Daily Mail*, came, if I remember right, the *Daily Chronicle* and a first experience of that work as a 'special reporter' which, with the writing of books, was to be his chief occupation during the subsequent years. I forget what he published first, but I know that a biography of the Duke of Buckingham was one of his earliest ventures. Presently, the *Tribune*, the loudly heralded new morning newspaper which was to be the organ of the Liberal Party, entered on its luckless existence, with Philip Gibbs as its literary editor. The *Tribune* died ingloriously within a year, but its literary editor turned his experience to excellent account in his best novel, *The Street of Adventure*.

What year was it that Dr. Cook did not reach the North Pole? I forget, and I am jotting down these very imperfect memories in a remote village many miles away from any reference books. Anyway, Philip was at Copenhagen with a number of other London journalists, among them Mr. Stead, to meet that accomplished — explorer. Every one else swallowed Dr. Cook's concoctions, but Philip Gibbs refused to do so. He smelled a rat, and he went for the unfortunate impostor like a veritable rat-terrier. All his newspaper colleagues thought he was making a fool of himself — even Mr. Stead urged him to desist, declaring that he was ruining his whole career. I remember how anxious I was for him, myself, for he seemed to be judging by instinct rather than on evidence, and there was material for a libel action in his every message. But he was perfectly right, and all ended happily — except for poor Dr. Cook.

Now, I must skip some years and come to the war in the Balkans. I suppose there was never so raw a war cor-

respondent as the Philip Gibbs who was then sent out (by the *Daily Graphic*) to describe the fighting. As the most experienced and most distinguished of all the old stagers expressed it, he looked the sort of dreamy youth who would always leave his kit behind and never know how to get himself a square meal. But within a very few weeks he proved himself, on the contrary, to be a young man of much resourcefulness, and he accomplished his mission right well. So well that, when the great war broke out in 1914, he was among the first 'specials' to go to the front.

How splendidly he acquitted himself during those long and terrible years needs no recounting. In a review of one of his war books, that same Balkan colleague of his, cited above, Mr. H. W. Nevinson, whose own record of the Dardanelles campaign is a military classic, declared generously: 'He has done better work than any of us.' That is the general verdict. Without Nevinson's own profound knowledge and fastidious literary style, without many of the gifts to be found among his other competitors, Philip Gibbs, by right chiefly of his pluck, and grit, and pertinacity, and his warm sympathy and observant eyes, is held by almost every one to rank first among all the British chroniclers of the war.

What of his future? Who can prophesy? Certainly not himself. He has never been a far-seeing planner-out of his own life. He has just jogged along, with an occasional big spurt. Perhaps the biggest spurt of all, brought to a close with the ending of the great war, is now to be followed by another of a new kind. His acceptance of the editorship of the *Review of Reviews* suggests as much. A man must gird up his loins in order to follow worthily in the footsteps of the brave and brilliant founder of that famous periodical.

Yet many of Sir Philip's friends

would not have been surprised if with his latest volume, *People of Destiny* — wherein, with a sympathy and appreciation almost unexampled among English writers, he has recorded his impressions of the United States — he had decided to withdraw from London, altogether. I fancy that a quiet country life, with his pen and his books, is what he really yearns for, even now.

He is a genuine bookman — not a scholar exactly, but a real *lover* of books. Except music, he has no other absorbing enthusiasms. Reading and writing, writing and reading — that is how it is natural to him to spend his existence. Thus employed, with his wife and fine young son for company, Philip Gibbs is the happy man he deserves to be.

[*London Quarterly Review*]

A ROYAL ANTHOLOGY

BY T. ALEXANDER SEED

THE title of this charming and informing anthology is a little misleading. The author, who writes, not as a royalist, but simply as a Frenchman, has succeeded in his aim, and has presented a selection of the thoughts of fifteen out of the fifty Kings of France in an attractive form, with copious and illuminating notes; but comparatively few of his excerpts answer to our notion of a *pensée*; in which, as Joubert says, 'the ambition of an author is to put a book into a page, a page into a phrase, and a phrase into a word.' Most of his extracts are more essayish than aphoristic; but whether the reflections, observations, and opinions he has chosen from a multitude of documents are diffuse or concentrated, they are used to show that the kings in question, though often weak, misguided, and tyrannical, were not the monsters of the prejudiced historian or the popular imagination, but men who, as a rule, exhibit in their writings much fairness of mind, a high sense of duty, moderation, and devotion to the

golden mean; and some of whom displayed in rich abundance Shakespeare's 'king-becoming graces,— justice, verity, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude.'

St. Louis fitly leads the way, the fairest flower of Christian chivalry, the pure-souled, tender-hearted, stainless Parsifal of France. His famous letter to his son is given in full, and extracts from a less-known missive to his daughter, whom he playfully exhorts to revise her budget, and, when it is a question of buying, 'incline to the less rather than to the more.' Then follow extracts from Philippe le Bel on the horrors of war, and from Charles the Sixth, the well-beloved, on 'Sweet Peace,' who contributed a beatitude which finds an echo in the writings of many of the later kings: 'Blessed the kings who shall be numbered with those who have loved peace on earth.'

Louis XI, 'that universal spider,' was too much engaged in the fabrica-