

## Northcliffe

*At the War, by Lord Northcliffe. New York: G. H. Doran & Co. \$2.00.*

**L**ORD NORTHCLIFFE has a somewhat childish vanity. He is a man with a great reputation. In a country where the successful demagog is the conservative demagog, he has played the rôle to perfection. He has appeared as a defender of established institutions against all sorts of upstarts from the suffragettes to Lloyd George. He has satisfied cheap appetites in every way compatible with a minimum of literacy, and has made an art of gilding the national gingerbread. He has utilized the pomp of the *Times* and the circumstance of the *Daily Mail* to carry out the exploitation of public opinion, and as a result if not as an object he has become enormously wealthy and important and a peer. And yet he writes a book.

The book gives Lord Northcliffe away. It reveals him not as the statesman but as the press agent of the popular English mind. Although France and Belgium and Italy and Switzerland and Spain come within his vision, he does not see them with a European intelligence, as one might hope of a maker of premiers. He sedulously reports the "popular" manifestations of the war, of the soldiers and the neutrals and the Red Cross and the big generals. There is an absence of all personal illumination. There is a great deal of stock sentimentality and flub-dub and attitudinizing, a certain amount of shrewd observation. There is no particular concern for the truth. It is as if George M. Cohan had edited a Yankee-Doodle-Dandy newspaper instead of writing songs and chanting them; and had been compelled, by reason of the energy and audacity and resourcefulness of his popular achievement, to sustain a heavy national pose.

As an introduction to Lord Northcliffe's mind, one should take the rubber-stamp phrases with which his book is filled. It is nothing against a newspaper proprietor that he cannot write freshly. He is a publisher, not a contributor. But the kind of triteness to which a man is prone gives the penumbra of his personality. So Northcliffe is to be found chattering about "our dear soldier boys," "the desire to rid fair France of her despoiler," "a photo of wife and bairn," "the marriage to which every patriotic woman looks forward," "a long series of palatial hospitals for our soldier boys," "floating hospitals, most beautifully fitted up, literally sea-palaces for the wounded," "a chin to be reckoned with," "Sir Anthony Bowlby, the distinguished surgeon," "workers in speckless and palatial hospitals." "Such a far-flung and minutely complicated machine did not spring like Minerva from the head of Jove," "*facile princeps*," "that alert and hustling monarch, King Manoel of Portugal, a young man with a future, I am very sure, is a tireless Red Cross worker." "Far from the madding crowd." "Equally careless of our thanks or of our appreciation." "It is the way of the British soldier; for within the breast of a hero he cherishes ever the heart of a little child." "The miasmic exhalations of the Upas tree of Westminster." "In these great days the breath of war is the breath of life, and the spirit of sacrifice is the spirit of regeneration." "War is war."

With a mind of the press-agent quality indicated by these phrases, Lord Northcliffe starts out to do his work as advertiser for the Allies, and he does it by giving full play to the most insular prejudices and by talking every conceivable kind of credulous cant. "The faces

of our soldiers, unlike those of the Germans, are full of individuality." "Now that we have real war news from the able scribes who are allowed to tell us freely and frankly what is happening . . ." "The sooner the German prisoners are put to work and help to shorten the war the better." "Germans are naturally, so far as the Prussians and Bavarians are concerned, extremely cruel." "German prisoners are content with their lot." As to Sir Douglas Haig, "Fifeshire is the home of the national game of Scotland; and it is the imperturbability of the Fifer that makes him so difficult to beat in golf, in affairs, and in war." "Père Joffre, who has the destinies of France in his hands." "General Birdwood, the idol of the Anzacs." "'There reigns in Germany considerable misery.' All agreed that butter is unobtainable, meat scarce (except in Alsace and parts of Pomerania), fat almost unknown." "It is essential to complete victory that each of the Allies should feel towards the others the trust and admiration which they all merit and which knowledge alone can engender and maintain." "It is not the immediate policy of the British Government to emphasize German cruelties, and so I will not repeat the innumerable stories I have heard." "The Germans in our hands are, in my personal opinion, treated with unnecessary and wasteful comfort." "President Wilson, who, like most Americans, is not liked in Spain, by reason of the loss of Cuba, and whose Mexican policy is not pleasing to a country that has millions invested in that distraught El Dorado, is quite a hero of the Germanophiles." "I am doubtful of the lasting effect of anything short of a smashing and palpable military defeat of Germany." "Little Portugal, who has not been afraid to throw down her glove to the Kaiser."

This is "the strongest voice in England," as his publisher defines him, "daring, cordial, discerning, optimistic, . . . the man who has been back of mighty, beneficent and fruitful movements and who must now be recognized as one of the real rulers of his generation—without portfolio."

The only policy one is able to disengage from the rambling notes of Lord Northcliffe is a belief in the necessity for Germanizing England. He celebrates "the British power of quick improvisation." "No Prussian thoroughness can better these British war-training schools in France." "There is beyond question a growing demand for the filling up of more and more forms in connexion with the Army." "I often wonder what would happen if war were to take place in England, with our small, narrow lanes and well-kept but illogically arranged roads. . . . I presume the authorities have thought out all these things." "Just as Grant's soldiers, the Grand Army of the Republic, dominated the elections in the United States for a quarter of a century, so will the men I have seen in the trenches and in the ambulances come home and demand by their votes the reward of a very changed England—an England they will fashion and share; an England that is likely to be as much a surprise to the present owners of Capital and leaders of Labor as it may be to the owners of the land." There is a great regret, in addition, that British propaganda is so defective in Switzerland and Spain. "It is particularly disagreeable to notice the favorable and agreeable manner in which the Hun is received in Spanish society." Lord Northcliffe rejoices when, as in Italy, the truth is appreciated. The late Francis Joseph was known there "not as a venerable old man borne down by family sorrows, but as shrewd, hard, imperious, and impervious to all family bereavement."

Efficiency has its word of praise from Northcliffe: "To-day, almost before the reek and fume of battle are over, almost before our own and the enemy dead are all buried, the Salvage Corps appears on the bloody and shell-churned scene to collect and pile unused cartridge and machine-gun belts, unexploded bombs, old shell cases, damaged rifles, haversacks, steel helmets, and even old rags, which go to the base, and are sold at £50 a ton. It is only old bottles, which with old newspaper, letters, meat tins, and broken boxes are a feature of the battlefields, that do not appear to be worth the salvage." In this context Northcliffe forgets "our heroic dead," as indeed he does frequently. His normal tone is this: "I did not linger unduly at Cormons, because an interesting battle was raging close at hand, and every minute brought its stretcher with its conscious or unconscious piece of dishevelled, blood-stained humanity, from which rose a great cloud of flies—so numerous as to be positively noisy."

Lord Northcliffe is undoubtedly an aggressive personage, a promoter of a familiar type. In this book, however, he not merely shows himself to be uncritical, insensitive and sentimental, he exhibits the narrowest ideas as to the war.

This country has its own demagogic newspaper proprietors, and it is quite likely they would produce similar effusions in war-time. That hardly makes it more palatable. It only makes one sympathize with the Englishmen who, in peace or war, see Northcliffe as focussing and exploiting prejudice.

F. H.

## An Honest Doctor

*The Memoirs of a Physician. Translated From the Russian of Vikenty Veressayev, by Simeon Linden. With an Introduction and Notes by Henry Pleasants, Jr., M.D. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$1.50.*

ALTHOUGH written some twenty years ago in Russia the condition of affairs in the doctor's profession and in the public's reaction to that profession which this book so frankly reveals is not altogether out-of-date even in 1916 in the United States. Science has advanced, but it has not advanced to the point where physicians never make incorrect diagnoses, those nightmares of the profession, and the passages in Veressayev's book in which he describes what happens as the result of a mistake make bad reading for anyone without good health or stout nerves. Public opinion has advanced, too, but it has not advanced to the point where medicine is entirely without the flavor of a black art, where everybody in the despair of illness or the impending death of a person beloved intelligently recognizes the doctor's limitations. Veressayev is tragically frank in his statement of the impotence of science before many, in fact before most, diseases. He tells how frightened he was when he first began practice, wondering how people could possibly trust him enough to come to him for advice, yet how they relied on him to exorcise the demons of the most mysterious or difficult ailments. Deaths came as the result of certain organic diseases to patients for whom, quite literally, he could do nothing except by suggestion stimulate their own powers of resistance. He tells of giving colored water to tuberculosis patients working twelve hours in badly ventilated rooms, when he realized that the only cure would be months in the open air—an economic impossibility for those poor devils. How he came to reconcile his conscience to

these innocent deceptions that kept hope alive is very probably a transcript of the psychological history of many private practitioners to-day. Their function is to create hope when there is no hope.

Which perhaps explains why the public in general clings so desperately to the myth of the doctor's omniscience. People want to believe in it. And of course the unscrupulous in the profession—for the myth that doctors, of the same weak clay as ourselves, are all noble and disinterested has been shattered by gay realists like Shaw—do not hesitate to encourage that ignorance and to wrap the trade of doctors in the folds of some higher mystery. I venture that nothing is more irritating than the doctor who covers his own doubt and uncertainty with the pretentious jargon of the schools or with "harmless" prescriptions, written with an elaborate flourish. Who has not at some time squirmed when he paid a large fee for listening to a doctor advise general hygienic and dietetic measures of the most elementary kind with an air of initiating one into the Eleusinian mysteries of existence? Veressayev by his very honesty and straightforwardness shows that it is the organization of society as a whole that furnishes the impulse for this modern obscurantism. Where people live in decency and cleanliness with enough money to take the radical and expensive cures of common sense, such as exercise, fresh air and good food, the doctor ceases to be the magician and becomes the friend and adviser. In fact Veressayev raises the question, very much as Shaw raised it in his preface to "The Doctor's Dilemma," whether or not the day of the private practitioner as such will not have to go ultimately. There is also such a thing as division of labor in medicine as there is in industry; yet "the family doctor" is supposed to minister to a cold, extirpate the bacillus of infantile paralysis and operate on the thyroid gland, all with equal facility.

Other and uglier questions are raised by the book. Veressayev does not mince words over vivisection's cruelty; but he comes finally to the conventional position, as one imagines most sensible people do, that vivisection is necessary. When in 1883 the Prussian government, answering the pressure of the anti-vivisectionist's agitation, requested the medical faculties of the colleges honestly to give their opinion of its necessity, an eminent German physiologist sent the government Herrmann's "Handbook on Physiology," having previously struck out all those facts which it would have been impossible to establish without recourse to vivisection. According to Veressayev, Herrmann's book, thanks to such annotations, acquired the appearance of a Russian newspaper after it had passed through the censor's hands; more text was crossed out than left untouched.

But perhaps the seamiest side of the doctor's profession is just that side for which it is the most difficult to see a remedy: the training of the younger doctors and the acquisition of new knowledge, both aspects of the same problem. If it is true that the progress of medicine has been over a mountain of corpses, one objects to its being over one's own corpse. If it is also true that in medicine "nothing risked, nothing gained," one prefers to have the gain to humanity made at the expense of somebody else. Neither does one relish the thought that one's own body must be the practice field for some new surgeon, as yet unskillful in the wielding of a knife and quite likely to make a mistake that will be fatal. Yet old and experienced doctors cannot live forever, nor can the search for new knowledge be wholly extinguished. Veressayev is barren of suggestions on these difficult points. He writes many