

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profession and in the public's reaction to that profession which this book so frankly reveals is not altogether out-of-date even in 1916 in the United States.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

shocking—and probably true—passages describing his own fatal mistakes when he “was getting his hand in,” and the records of inoculation of healthy people with malignant diseases for the purposes of experimentation (for the honor of the human race it can be said that many doctors are just as ready to experiment on themselves) are enough to make sensitive people shun a doctor’s consulting room as they would an execution chamber. Yet the most that Veressayev suggests are certain changes in the routine of training and educating doctors and the compulsory practice of surgeons on animals before they operate on human beings. Sheer recklessness in experimentation has probably much decreased since Veressayev wrote his volume, but the main problem is still unsolved. Perhaps the organization of clinics and the extension of the principle of division of labor point a way.

Dr. Veressayev’s pessimistic reflections on the degeneration of the race, due to the protecting of the weak and unfit, are not deeply impressive. Compared with the average citizen of to-day the life of primitive man was scrawny, short and sordid. Longevity has increased, even if neurasthenia has too, although it must be remembered that mid-Victorian ladies were afflicted with the “vapors” and in the middle ages the village idiots were surely as common as the village drunkards to-day. I recall a passage in the biography of a captain in Drake’s fleet, written by an Elizabethan contemporary. That early Boswell mentioned naturally that a friend died at the age of 40 “of old age.” How many modern Maeterlinckian ailments did that euphemistic phrase cover! However, these chapters on degeneration are not the most important or interesting of the book. What matters is the recital of the soul struggles of an honest doctor up against conditions of social life and intelligence which he, as a doctor, was only able to change by an infinitesimal sum. The book gives no occasion for despair. It destroys false confidence while creating sincerer faith.

H. S.

Another Hindoo Poet

The Golden Threshold, by Sarojini Naidu, with an introduction by Arthur Symons. New York: John Lane Co. \$1.00.

THIS Hindoo lady came to England when she was sixteen. She became a student at King’s College, London, and afterwards at Girton College, Cambridge. She stayed a long time in Europe. She wanted to marry a man that her family did not approve of because he was not a Brahmin. She went back to India with a spirit of independence acquired in Europe and married her lover. She has four children—at least there is a poem in this book addressed to her children and four are named. During her first visit to England she made the acquaintance of the critic Edmund Gosse, who encouraged her to be a poet—as she puts it herself, he “showed her the way to the golden threshold.” She also established friendship with Mr. Arthur Symons, whose insatiable artistic curiosity has always been alert at a hint of the exotic. He found a publisher for her poems; and for this volume he has written one of his charming intimate introductions which reveal so discreetly the personal traits of his subject—a form of literary art of which he has inherited the secret from Théophile Gautier and shares with nobody living. This Indian lady wrote him some very beautiful letters in the course of her travels in

Europe, and after her return to India. He gives many quotations from them, and being anxious that you should read them with appreciation, he takes you up and introduces you to the poet.

“To those who knew her in England, all the life of the tiny figure seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes; they turned towards beauty as the sunflower turns towards the sun, opening wider and wider until one saw nothing but the eyes. She was dressed always in clinging dresses of Eastern silk, and as she was so small, and her long black hair hung straight down her back, you might have taken her for a child. She spoke little, and in a low voice, like gentle music; and she seemed, wherever she was, to be alone.”

“Through that soul,” continues Mr. Symons, “I seemed to touch and take hold upon the East.” That may very well be; Sarojini Naidu is a Hindoo woman of pure blood. But there is nothing specially Hindoo in the book now published; it is European in structure, and even in tradition it is European. Girton and King’s College have done their work thoroughly. Even the beautiful letters to Mr. Symons are the letters of a highly cultured, artistically sensitive, European woman. If one did not know who the author is, one would say that these poems were by the wife of some British official in India—perhaps Irish, because here and there a note sounds which one somehow associates with Ireland.

“O little mouse, why dost thou cry
While merry stars laugh in the sky?”

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