The Whispering Gallery

In Which We Come to Think Better of the Late Czar Nicholas, and Meet Merton of the Movies, Out Where Men Are Men.

By DONALD ADAMS.

ONE of the most absorbing stories we have read is Pierre Gilliard's account of the last years and the death of Czar Nicholas and his family. It is published by Doran under the title of "Thirteen Years at the Russian Court." We doubt if there is to be encountered anywhere a more intimate or a more humanly interesting narrative dealing with the life of kings and queens. If there is we have not read it.

M. Gilliard's book deserves to be read widely, not only for its human interest but because it is a historical document of great value, one to which all historians of Europe in the twentieth century will turn with profit.

In his capacity of tutor to the daughters of the Czar and later to the young Czarevitch M. Gilliard came into relations of exceptional intimacy with the royal family, particularly in the tense hours leading up to and following the Czar's abdication. The conversations he had with Nicholas and the Czarina present their characters in a very different light from that in which they were made to appear through the efforts of German propaganda.

There is no reason to suspect M. Gilliard of special pleading. He is a Frenchman of Swiss birth, not a Russian. The Czar and his family are dead, the victims of one of the foulest crimes in history. What he writes about them serves only their memory.

"In this book," writes M. Gilliard in his introduction, "I have endeavored to bring Nicholas II. and his family back to life. My aim is to be absolutely impartial and to preserve complete independence of mind in describing the events of which I have been an eye witness. It may be that in my search for truth I have presented their political enemies with new weapons against them, but I greatly hope that this book will reveal them as they really were, for it was not the glamour of their imperial dignity which drew me to them, but their nobility of mind and the wonderful moral grandeur they displayed through all their sufferings."

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Nicholas Romanoff.

THE world knew little about Nicholas Romanoff beyond the fact that he was a "weak" monarch, and cared less. M. Gilliard does not try to create a fictitious strength for the Czar's character, but he does make us believe that he took the loss of his crown like a sportsman, that he thought if he yielded to pressure and abdicated Russia might then stand together and fight on with the Allies. He wrote a proclamation to the soldiers after he gave up the crown, which was never read to them, begging that they stand by the Provisional Government and prevent Germany's triumph.

It is interesting to find him admiring Poincare because "there is nothing of the diplomatist about him. If only we could do without diplomacy humanity would make immense strides."

The Czarina, educated in England and the favorite granddaughter of Queen Victoria, has been persistently pictured as pro-German. At the beginning of the war she said to M. Gilliard: "What will become of Germany? What humiliation; what a downfall is in store for her! And all for the sins of the Hohenzollerns—their idiotic pride and insatiable ambition. Whatever has happened to the Germany of my childhood? I have such happy and poetic memories of my early years in Darmstadt and the good friends I had there. But on my later visits Germany seemed to me a changed country—a country I did not know and had never known. I had no community of thought or feeling with any one except the old friends of days gone by. Prussia has meant Germany's ruin."

The story of how a Jewish commissar of the Soviet regime, aided by a crew of convicts and several Austro-German prisoners, shot and bayoneted the royal family to death at Ekaterinburg and then burned the bodies has already received wide publicity. In his book M. Gilliard tells how the evidence of the crime was collected, and how careful were the efforts made to keep knowledge of it from the Russian peasantry.

"Thirteen Years at the Russian Court" is in our opinion an unfortunate title. It leads one to expect the conventional memoir, which M. Gilliard's book is very far from being. There is little about court life and diplomatic circles in "Thirteen Years at the Russian Court." We see the Czar and Czarina with the bars of etiquette let down. The book left us feeling what a pleasure it would be for us personally to choke Yourofsky, the Jewish commissar, to death.

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H. Leon Wilson.

EVER since Harry Leon Wilson wrote "Ruggles of Red Gap" we have been hoping that he would some day write another book that would paralyze us with laughter as that one did. The fact that we first read "Ruggles" under circumstances which made us easy prey for humor does not alter our present estimation of its worth. It came into our hands while we were digging ditches—we dislike to call them trenches because we never carried our excavations into France—at the Plattsburg training camp. For two or three successive Sundays we carried "Ruggles" out to the pine grove just beyond the barracks and read it there with two of our friends. We clawed up the ground over that book.

Mr. Wilson has not achieved such heights of drollery since. There has been humor in everything he has written, but of late he has been spreading it thin. "Merton of the Movies," which Doubleday Page has just published, although it has only three hundred odd pages, is much too long, the obvious explanation of that being that it was first published in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

There is nevertheless, no little fun to be had skipping through "Merton of the Movies." Nowhere have we found the bunkum of the films better travestied.

Merton Gill is a tank town store clerk who dreams of himself as Clifford Armytage. He will be a film star who will do "the better sort of things, the things that are worthwhile." No slapstick for Merton. Rather will he emulate Buck Benson, portrayer of those strong, silent souls out in the open spaces, out in "God's great out-of-doors," where men are men. Merton's ambition to do Western stuff suffers no inhibition from the fact that a dappled pony on a merry-go-round would tax the limit of his equestrian ability.

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Western Stuff.

HE takes the hoardings of years at A. G. Gashwiler's emporium and goes confidently to the coast. And there the Fates stick out their tongues at Merton. The director of the Buckeye comedies, low stuff which is abhorrent to Merton's earnest soul, uses him in a series of burlesques in which Merton plays the strong, silent man of the open and some other stereotypes.

Merton doesn't realize for a moment that he is funny when he puts his arm around Pinto's neck, and says brokenly, "Good-by, old pal; they're takin' ye frum me." It doesn't occur to Merton that Pinto's neck is extraordinarily scrawny—that he is, on the whole, a sad looking horse.

"Go to it, cowboy; take all the footage you want," called Baird in a curiously choked voice.

"The actor took some more footage. 'But we got to keep a stiff upper lip, old pal, you and me both. No cryin', no bustin' down. We had our last gallop together, an' we're at the forkin' of the trail. So we got to be brave—we got to stand the gaff."

Once in his story Mr. Wilson placed a heavy strain on our credulity. Merton is burlesquing the simple country boy—in other words, he is just being himself. His hard working old mother is keeping the farm together by making a sort of improved grape juice. Merton notices that one of the pots in mother's kitchen has a tightly closed top with a coil of copper tubing, and that close ups are made of this device. Merton takes that seriously, too.

But if we are not careful we'll be taking Mr. Wilson's book seriously.

Poetry, &c.

IF it were not for Archy and Hermione, the Old Soak and Capt. Fitzurse we suppose more would be heard of Don Marquis the poet. Apparently, if a man writes other things besides poetry it is those other things by which he is judged; the poetry we regard somewhat as an indulgence he permits himself and which we accept accordingly. One hears little of Chesterton the poet, and yet we have a notion that some of his ballads will be read when the contentious effervescence of his prose is forgotten.

But there is no use trying to pin Don Marquis down as a prose satirist, a poet or a teller of tales. He simply will not stay put. We cannot say which is the most real, the most enduring part of him. Being concerned just now with his poetry particularly we cannot say he is this kind of a poet or another. He is quicksilver. He is the modernist on this page, and, behold, here he is writing Sapphics. Here is a poem an Englishman might have written under the walls of Oxford, and then: "Kiss her, you crook; it is your life work: Sweat!" The amazing part of it is that none of these moods is forced.

And here we haven't even mentioned the book which prompted all this. It is "Poems and Portraits" (Doubleday - Page). We suppose there is one thing that does bind these poems together, and that is their irony. Most of them possess it, and they have the accompaniment of irony, which is strength. There is little here that is merely pretty. There is much that is searchingly beautiful, much that is acrid and keen, much that genuinely soars and sings.

Frederic Harrison at Ninety

NOVISSIMA VERBA. By Frederic Harrison. Henry Holt & Co.

WHEN the essays which comprise "Novissima Verba" were written Frederic Harrison was on the eve of ninety years. We shall not say that the articles have the virile spirit of the youngsters of Greenwich Village, for that were unfair to Mr. Harrison. They are brisker and snappier than the writings of the young Rebels of the Brevoort basement. Here is a man who was born before either THE NEW YORK HERALD or THE SUN was founded, yet he is a veritable machine gun. Like Bryce, he has watched more than two generations of political change; when he was at school the only republic in Europe was the Swiss. Now there are a dozen. The only thrones left are in England, Italy and Spain. Himself a loyal monarchist, Mr. Harrison remarks that "No one can count on there being any kings left at the end of the century. When you have once accepted unlimited democracy the inevitable step is the republic."

Nothing is so edifying as to see a lad of ninety scolding a child of eighty-two. This is Mr. Harrison chiding Mr. Thomas Hardy for his gloom. They are friends, but Frederic thinks that Thomas, particularly in his verse, is slapping it on too black. "In this mass of lyrical effusion [Hardy's "Collected Poems"] Nature is a graveyard; man is a hopeless mystery; love works out tragedies; death ends all." Mr. Harrison, like most of us, admires Mr. Hardy, but he evidently does not believe in being too morose in one's early years.

Mr. Harrison comments bitterly on the Versailles treaty: "The thing was a case of cephalitis turgida—swelled head. Wilson caught the disease from Wilhelm; and he improved on it, with the American way of going ten times better than any one else. He infected France; and then the British good sense succumbed. And in the hullabaloo of the peace celebrations real facts and imminent dangers were hidden away and overlooked. We were hoodwinked. I know that I was."

Sometimes Mr. Harrison is astonished, if not alarmed, by the "suddenness with which rooted ideas are abandoned." He sees the picture changing rapidly: "Women have votes and even exceed the male votes. Home rule is carried by Unionist majorities against the Liberals. Labor becomes the New Rich. Bishops and deans invite Nonconformists to their cathedrals. The House of Lords leads the way in divorce. Socialism is advocated in academies, literary and aristocratic quaitas. And the biggest republic on earth goes dry and retires from the world." The essays were written in 1920 on topics then current, but they remain true and bold to-day.

Captain McCullagh's Story

A PRISONER OF THE REDS: THE STORY OF A BRITISH OFFICER CAPTURED IN SIBERIA. By Francis McCullagh. E. P. Dutton & Co.

MUCH as the world grew accustomed to horrors during the great war, it is hard for the reader to face with equanimity the hideous tales of wholesale death and destruction set down by Capt. McCullagh in the matter of fact account of experiences in Siberia and Russia between November, 1919, and April, 1920, in four of which months he was a prisoner of the Soviet Government. Although he is a bitter opponent of the Bolsheviks and what they stand for, Capt. McCullagh is very fair in all his statements as to what he saw in Siberia and Russia for this reason:

"I really hate Bolshevism. . . . but I also hate propaganda in so far as that word means the selection of all the facts supporting a certain theory, and the deliberate suppression of all the facts which tell against that theory, or *vice versa*. Even during the great war propaganda did more harm than good to every nation which made use of it. Laughed at by the soldiers, distrusted by the general public, regarded with unspeakable contempt by independent journalists, it was too often used merely for the purpose of screening Governments which had miscalculated and generals who had blundered. The only good propaganda is propaganda of the truth."

His narrative begins with a description of the attempted escape of the members of the British Military Mission, to which he was attached as Intelligence Officer from Omsk in November, 1919, by a train over the Trans-Siberian Railway. In addition to the extraordinary discomforts of such travel in such a country, rent by civil war, they had to help keep the engine watered and fueled, and this in winter time, with everything frozen up and only wood to feed the furnace. One reads of a train being blown up accidentally with the loss of 3,000 lives, of a hospital train catching fire and the patients burned alive, of the bodies of dead soldiers stripped of their clothes and piled up like so much cordwood alongside roads or near villages. And everywhere lack of sufficient food, clothing and fuel for the people of this stricken country.

The most striking chapters of the book are those describing the killing of the Czar and his family, a narrative culled from the testimony of witnesses and from a personal visit to the town in which the assassinations took place. Capt. McCullagh attempted to interview Yurovsky, the Czaricide, but he was so overcome by the horrors of the association of the man and his deed that he could not bring himself to ask Yurovsky a single question about that event. Capt. McCullagh does not believe the Bolshevik Government was responsible for the deed and says so.

He gives vivid pictures of life in Moscow and of its chief political characters and of his eventual release after refusing a position as a journalist by the Bolsheviks. The writer took all his experiences in a philosophical spirit and obviously lessened their hardships by adopting that attitude. For those with an insatiable appetite for news of Russian affairs under the present regime this volume will afford much, if somewhat strong, meat.

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"The Outline of Science," by Prof. J. Arthur Thomson, the British scientist and author, is being published in four volumes, the first of which will appear early in April.

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