

A BRIEF REVIEW IN WORDS AND PICTURES OF THE THINGS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE LAST YEAR

The Year 1909 One of Achievement

North Pole Discovery and Aviation Triumphs Foremost—Passing of Swinburne—A Review of the Twelve-month

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WHEN the future historian records the achievements and the events of the twentieth century's first decade it is highly probable that the year 1909 will lead the group in world importance. This has been a most notable year. Things have happened in 1909. Discoveries that thrill the souls of men around the globe have been made. Invention, which in itself is discovery, has gone forward with its daring strides. Death, slinging its darts every year, hit shining marks in 1909.

The year 1909 has been called "the year of genius" because so many men of worldwide fame were born therein. This year, exactly a century later, may be termed the year of achievement. To all time this year will be known as the one in which the north pole was reached—or "discovered." If you like that better. Possibly the pole was reached in 1908, but that remains to be proved. A nobody doubts that Commander Robert E. Peary of the United States navy actually arrived at the pole on April 6, 1909, as he announced to the world on the 7th day of September. Six days prior to that date Dr. Frederick A. Cook of Brooklyn had sent down from the frozen north a message that vibrated around the globe. He said he had reached the pole on April 21, 1909. Whether Dr. Cook got there or not, the fact remains that the year 1909 has the imperishable honor of announcing the conquering of the world's top.

But let us not permit this predominant pole talk to obscure other superlative affairs of 1909.

Man Flies Across Channel.

Let it be not forgotten—it cannot be, for that matter—the fact that on the 25th of July, 1909, A. D. a Frenchman named Louis Bleriot, a man bird, a person of dauntless nerve, a fearless argonaut of the atmosphere, arose from the ground at Calais in an aeroplane and flew across the English channel to the chalk cliffs of Dover, making the distance of twenty-one miles in forty minutes, beating the steambot time between France and England by ten minutes. Even Napoleon Bonaparte could not get across to England for all his conquering legions, yet this Frenchman of 1909, ignoring utterly all accepted and approved methods of transportation, made heroic conquest of the inviolable air and shot himself by whirling motor across the channel.

This was one of the year's achievements that make it epochal. Bleriot proved that the aeroplane, a craft heavier than air, can sustain itself in aerial flight above an ocean roadway and make safe landing on the other side.

What has been done once can be done again. The aeroplane is advancing. The Wright brothers, pioneers in aviation, have performed marvels in 1909. Their aviation work in Europe and America has attained in this year a height of excellence never reached before. They, too, could fly across the channel if they cared to do so, but these Americans are not spectacularly inclined. They are thorough, hard devotees to the science of aviation, laboring assiduously to develop the aeroplane into a thing of practical value.

Work of the Wrights.

The Wrights care little for record breaking. They care much for making their mechanism available for actual use in transportation. What they have done this year is an earnest of future achievement. They have demonstrated conclusively, beyond cavil, beyond peradventure of doubt, that the air is navigable by heavier than air craft. Much remains to be done, but the Wrights and other aviators have shown this year that the dream of centuries is upon the very eve of fulfillment.

The death list of 1909 is notable. A great poet, a great novelist, a great editor have died. These are, in order indicated, Algernon Charles Swinburne, George Meredith, Edward Everett Hale, General Oliver Otis Howard and Richard Watson Gilder.

Death of Swinburne.

Swinburne was first of those to pass. He died April 10 at his home, Putney, England, at the age of seventy-two. One of the strangest of human mortals was Swinburne. Understated, red haired, unassuming, he passed his long life as a recluse, never marrying. His bride was Poesy, espoused in early youth.

Before he grew his straggling red whiskers he looked like a troubadour of the middle ages. I have seen an early portrait of Swinburne by Dante G. Rossetti, his brother poet and painter, which shows him to have been almost womanish in appearance. He wore long wavy hair and his face suggested that of Shelley, though less ethereal. The superb masculinity of Swinburne, however, none who have read his poetry can question.

To Swinburne the English language was music. Words were throbbing violas; syllables were straying strings; sentences were splendid arias of sound. For a poet, he was the music master of English speech. The harshness of our conglomerate tongue was toned down and turned to melodies in his verse. No person who has written English verse ever captured like Swinburne the haunting wraiths of harmony wandering through the language, nor has any other poet wrought these elusive ghosts of speech into such masterful music.

There are poets and poets. Some of them are poets by brevet of courtesy. The distinction has been conferred upon them by undividing editors or by

persons of special plea. Swinburne was a poet by birthright. The divine fire burned within him. Fortunately for him and for humanity, he had sufficient income to fund him against the snail that chokes the doors of most men of genius. He could live his life and do his work undeterred by the nasty importunities which beset most mortals.

All his life Swinburne was just a poet, nothing else. He never was commonplace. He never yielded to popular demand. He never was compelled for the sake of a bread crust to write the namby pamby sort of aim which magazines editors accept and pay for—menageries. He wrote from his soul, and no man can dispute that Swinburne's was a soul of sky born ideals.

Swinburne was too big for the British laureateship. He was a democrat, a republican, a believer in the divine rights of the people. In 1890 he wrote a poem in which he suggested the assassination of Russia's czar because of that despot's crimes against humanity. That settles the matter so far as Swinburne's succession to the laureateship was concerned. When Tennyson died, two years later, the conservative administration of Great Britain never considered for a moment the claims of Swinburne to be poet laureate, though the man was indisputably and indubitably the foremost poet employing the English tongue.

Swinburne did not need the laureateship. His brow was wreathed with the laurel of love and appreciation from millions of hearts throughout the Empire. He was widely read and never will be. The man was an intellectual colossus, too big for the qualifications of the average brain. It is difficult for a man to understand an elephant.

Meredith was a friend of Swinburne and once lived with Swinburne and Rossetti. Eighty-one when he died, he was the connecting link between the grand old school of British novelists and the penny-a-liners of the present. It is interesting to note that Meredith's first novel, which perhaps is his greatest, was published in 1839. The same year that saw light "A Tale of Two Cities" by Dickens, "Adam Bede" by George Eliot, and "The Virginians" by William McKelpee. Meredith's book, "The Order of Richard Feverel" attracted the popular attention, though divinity critics foresaw that a novelist had arisen who would do high honor to the art.

"Richard Feverel" has grown in appreciation. Today, half a century after its publication, it is a favorite with the elect. It contains character studies that are rare in the vast bulk of English fiction. Meredith's last book, a volume of poems, was published in 1901. He began with poetry and ended with it, but his verse has not found the popular acceptance. It is rather the "best seller" sort of story writer, a writer of prose Meredith is a purist and a classic. He has the same keen appreciation of the value of words as to their shades of meaning that Swinburne had in relation to their metric and musical adaptability.

the Century Magazine. His work on this magazine was along lines of high ideals. Many features of great consequence, like the Nicolay and Hay Life of Lincoln and the long series of civil war articles, were printed in the Century under his editorship. Mr. Gilder was a veteran of the war. Gilder was a poet of large talent, though not one of genius. He belonged to the minor choir, but his verse was wholesome and delicate. He published many books of verse. His works contain lyrics of attractive quality. Mr. Gilder's fine appreciation of the poetry of others was one of his distinguishing traits. He sought to teach that in the great body of English verse there is much inspiration for men and women, inducing toward higher ideals of living.

Gilder was more than an editor and poet. He was a humanitarian enthusiast, who showed his faith by his works. It is due to him as much as to any other man that present day tenement house life in the city of New York is vast improvement upon that of a decade ago. As one of the leaders in the reforming of tenement conditions Mr. Gilder compelled the reconstruction of many miserable buildings and brought about the passage of laws which have served to relieve life in the slums of much of its former horror. Surely this work was worth while. The good that this man did will live after him.

Inauguration of Taft. To get back to living events, the year 1909 has been one of stir and activity. Happily sweet Peace has flourished her olive branch above most of the world. Indications that red war's wrinkled front was smoothened were visible in January, when on the 20th General Jose Miguel Gomez was proclaimed president of the republic of Cuba and the occupation by the United States came to an end. For several years our government had been compelled to occupy Cuba, with Charles E. Macgon as provisional governor, in order to keep peace in the island.

February was notable for the trip of William Howard Taft, president elect, to Panama. Mr. Taft made a voyage down to the canal, the work on which he had supervised as secretary of war, just to look around and see what was being done and make mental notes for future use. The inauguration of President Taft on March 4 will be remembered as long as any one of the many thousands gathered in Washington can recollect as the stormiest inauguration day ever known. Most of the elaborate plans for the day were upset by the unprecedented snowstorm. Taft, to his deep disappointment, took the oath of office inside the capitol instead of on the portico. He didn't take cold, and that was the main thing, for it would be sad to have a sick man begin house-keeping in the White House. Despite the inclement weather Mr. Taft wore his customary smile, which has continued right down to December.

The special session of congress on the tariff matter occupied the new president's attention until August, when, on the 5th, the bill finally passed. It was a memorable struggle. One development was the getting together of the Republican "insurgents" in congress, who still appear determined to get, if possible, the political scalp of Speaker Cannon. Representative Sereno E. Payne of New York state as chairman of the ways and means committee lends his name to the new tariff bill. It is called the Payne tariff, though there be those who aver that precious little of Payne is in it.

Nicaragua Under Discipline. December has been made notable by the eruption in Nicaragua. The people of the United States, having finally become disgusted with themselves for talking so much on the Cook-Peary imbroglio, were really hoping for some sort of "scrap" just to have something to talk about on which all Americans might agree.

When President Jose S. Zelaya, president of Nicaragua, executed Cannon and Groce, Americans captured in battle, the two men being officers in the revolutionary army, American citizens were a unit in indignation. "Irishmen of war are not lined up and shot in this country."

Phlander Chase Knox, secretary of state, who is a fighter himself, quickly voiced the national indignation when he demanded redress of Zelaya. The government dispatched a naval force to Nicaraguan waters to compel an apology and to see that peace is restored in that volcanic country, so that Americans resident there may be protected.

Important Events in Europe.

Across the sea the one event which appears to be of primary importance in the making of history was the revolution in Turkey. After many years of autocratic misrule "the sick man of Europe," Sultan Abdul Hamid, was deposed by the revolutionary party, or the Young Turks, who placed upon the throne Mohammed Reschid, brother of the deposed ruler. The Young Turks wrangle from the monarchical government a constitution, so that Turkey now takes her place, or promises to take her place, among the nations of the world which cherish and maintain in some degree the liberty of the individual.

The execution on Oct. 13 of Professor Francisco Ferrer, Spanish educator and sociologist, against the protests of many persons of distinction in Spain and elsewhere, caused the most intense sensation of the year in Europe. Ferrer was pronounced an anarchist by adherents of King Alfonso and was charged with instigating the Barcelona riots. His friends still maintain that he was executed without warrant in civilized procedures. They are building monuments and rearing statues to him in several European cities as a martyr to human liberty.

Happily no catastrophes of universal horror have marred the year though 1909 raised by only three days that most stupendous disaster of a time, the earthquake which destroyed Messina and other Italian cities and blotted out about 200,000 lives. New Year's day the world was just beginning to realize the overwhelming nature of that event, and the month of January was devoted mainly to the news chronicling of the carnage and its results.