

SOME BOOKS WORTH WHILE

Pen Pictures of Prominent People

By H. D. Rains

The man who is not intensely interested in world happenings today is assuredly a dull and unresponsive creature. Probably the years through which we are passing are the greatest in all the world's history. And because we are living in them we are largely insensible to their significance. But why should we imagine that the present is a puny time? A certain kind of writer has been wont to decry the present, lament the greatness of the past and bemoan his sorrow that he had to live in such a poverty stricken age. This kind of thing has been carried to the extent of becoming a fad, and an unhealthy one at that. The truth is that the present is a time of tremendous issues for the future weal or woe of mankind, that the men and women of today are doing deeds as noble and heroic as those of any past age, and that among the leaders of mankind in these latter days are men of giant intellectual and moral stature deserving

our respect and regard as much as any of the great ones of bygone days.

If this is correct, it cannot but be interesting and serve to aid our understanding of the times in which we live if we come to know something about the lives and characters of the great ones of today. Fortunately, it happens that it is not at all difficult to obtain such knowledge. There is a well-known London journalist, A. G. Gardiner, of the "Daily News," who has had remarkable opportunities of meeting and knowing the most prominent people, the people who are in the limelight in these terrible and trying days. There are three volumes in all of these pen pictures of prominent people and in this article we are concerned with two, "The Pillars of Society" and "The War Lords." Each of these books has about twenty sketches of famous men and women of today. The reading of the names is like reading the contemporary roll call of the great. Not many of the first rank men of today are missing. In "The War Lords" we start off with the Kaiser, then proceed to King Albert of

Belgium, General Joffre, the late Francis Joseph, General Botha, Germany's idol, Von Hindenburg, the ex-Czar, Sir John French, Sir John Jellicoe, Karl Liebknecht, the German socialist, and President Wilson, with a number of others. The other book, "The Pillars of Society," begins quite properly with King George V and deals with a long list of politicians and public men, journalists, actors, novelists and millionaires of Great Britain and America. Among those of most popular interest are men like Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, Lord Strathcona, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Bonar Law. It may be that some of the others will be of men with whose names even you are not familiar, but you have not to read the sketches unless you wish. If you read and appreciate those which do interest you, you will be certain to get your money's worth and more.

Tastes differ and no other person can prescribe for you with any degree of dogmatism, but I can point out the sketches that particularly appealed to

me and you can try them for yourself. Take the King for instance. To most of us the King is a mythical personage in a world afar off, but if you read Mr. Gardiner's sketch you will realize that he is a very human and natural person, much like you and me. No lover of ceremony or pretence, of simple, straightforward mind and purpose, earnestly striving to do his duty in his station as we in ours. "The surface is unpretentious, but the material is made for wear."

That is the picture given of our King. If you like contrasts you will get one if you then turn to the sketch of Teddy Roosevelt. The atmosphere here is very different. I have a suspicion that Mr. Gardiner is not quite fair to Mr. Roosevelt sometimes, though manifestly he is trying hard to be so. Usually when you have to try hard to be fair you don't succeed; and evidently Mr. Gardiner has not too much love for Roosevelt and his kind. Still, there is not a more vigorous or better drawn portrait in the book. It will be strange if you have not a more vivid idea of Mr. Roosevelt, even if your hero worship is spoiled a little in the process of reading. I wish I could quote the opening paragraph in full, but that is not possible in such an article. The general idea of the man is that "he is the playboy of the western world, rough, boisterous, rollicking, sending his barbaric yawn over the roof of the world." For President Wilson the clever English journalist has a much greater regard. There is a sketch of the president in both books, the one in "Pillars of Society" being the most graphic. The president is compared with Mr. Roosevelt, much to the disparagement of Mr. Roosevelt. The Englishman in Mr. Gardiner likes the quieter, more disciplined strength of Mr. Wilson better than the unrestrained exuberance of the rougher. When Mr. Gardiner turns to write about Sir Wilfrid Laurier he is much more balanced and impartial than any Canadian journalist would be in writing on the subject. It will be good for Canadians on both sides in politics to read this sketch. In Canada any article on the subject is either fulsomely flattering or grossly abusive. This sketch is neither. It weighs well Sir Wilfrid's remarkable distinction and political gifts, gives him due honor for his achievement in cementing the bonds of the two races of the Dominion and then brings home a charge of opportunism and a failure to lift Canadian politics to a high plane. It is, in all, a discriminating portrait.

In "The War Lords" you will be certain to read the sketch of the Kaiser. Some may consider that Mr. Gardiner has been more than fair to our great enemy, but all will agree that it is a wonderfully enlightening character study. Most likely it will give you a new view of the Kaiser. Then I fancy you will also read the sketch of "old Hindenburg." Here again there is every respect shown to a worthy and distinguished opponent. But read the sketch of the German Crown Prince and you will find a difference. This is one of the most scathing in the whole series. The conclusion is stated in Charles II's remark about Prince George, "I've tried him drunk and I've tried him sober and there's nothing in him either way." Exit the Crown Prince, or as someone wittily called him, the Crown Prince. Another royalty who receives treatment is that very royal prince, King Albert of Belgium. In this article the wrongs of Belgium move Mr. Gardiner to a lofty eloquence and the unselfish valor of her noble King finds fitting eulogy. In days when kings are suspect, the most radical amongst us will not withhold his tribute from Albert, King of the Belgians. Whether they call him king or president, he is a man for all that.

Any person who would like to read either or both of these tremendously interesting books can secure them from the Book Dept., Grain Growers' Guide, Winnipeg, at 45 cents each postpaid.

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