

A WAR-CORRESPONDENT OF THE
NEW DISPENSATION

THE PALM FOR WAR-REPORTING was awarded to the American, Will Irwin, early in the war by the *London Daily Mail*. He has, however, written little of the later phases of the struggle, and an Englishman, Mr. Philip Gibbs, now fills the English eye. His work for the *London Daily Chronicle* and *Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Times* has been constant, and his success is laid by the *English Bookman* (London) to the fact that he is also a novelist. "He has been able to bring the wide, modern, romantic outlook to bear in his survey and analysis of fighting and the conditions of fighting." He is a war-correspondent of "a new dispensation," giving "not a realistic or a melodramatic vision of war, but a naturalistic vision." Yet the man in the street would never pick him out for the rôle he is filling, so Mr. W. Douglas Newton, the *Bookman* writer, says:

"He is not only built small, but built almost daintily. He looks frail. His features are delicately fashioned. They are neat, and well cut, and of a cameo kind to fit his cameo pallor. Some one has likened his features to those of a Victorian intaglio, and that is not inapt. He has, at first glance, the look of a student, a man who has, with a certain human austerity, withdrawn from the excitements of the world to live among books."

Gibbs had written more than half a dozen novels when the war broke out, and he became a newspaper correspondent. Most of his *confrères*, eager for news, were relegated to the background, but Gibbs attached himself to one of the ambulances working with the Belgian Army and went to the firing-line. We read:

"In a personal sense his experiences in France will be as valuable to him as an artist, as they have been fortunate for us his readers. The war came at a phase in his mental development when his heart and mind were becoming more and more absorbed in a psychological interest in humanity. That psychological interest has made his writing on the war so precious; but how will the war affect him? One ventures to think that it will deepen and strengthen his artistic outlook to a very profound measure. For him it has come—with all its opportunities for perceiving the humanity of human nature made emphatic under great stress—when his psychological curiosity had entered on a phase of great activity after a spell of what one might call 'retarded action.'

"I mean by 'retarded action' that after starting out to consider human nature in sympathetic, spiritual fashion in his first novel, 'The Individualist,' a thoroughly interesting study of a woman beset by mental and emotional circumstances, he swung off on to a series of novels apropos, in which the story, the actual theme, assumed domination over the psychological aspect of his case. Of this group, 'The Spirit of Revolt,' 'The Street of Adventure,' and 'Intellectual Mansions, S. W.,' stand as examples. The theme of each of these novels, as well as their treatment, gives each the aspect of a journalistic coup rather than of a spiritual and humanly developed study. It was as though journalism had captured him and had given him that 'nose for copy' which had enabled him to perceive in each of his themes the great 'story' that the public would want. 'The Spirit of Revolt' is a novel of demagoguery, written at a time when the power of the labor men began to ferment the land. 'The Street of Adventure' is the story of a great newspaper which failed just when it appeared to promise an influential career—the actual failure of that paper was a topic on men's tongues when Gibbs wrote. 'Intellectual Mansions, S.W.' caught the beginnings of the woman's suffrage and the suburban culture movements just when these phases of life were beginning to impress the public. . . . His book, 'The Soul of the War,' is as full and as poignant as any novel. Its human quality is enormously moving. It is a naturalistic study of Armageddon, not all glitter as the romanticists would have it, not all evil as the realists would have it. The actual war is there: courage and grimness, squalor and nobility, beastliness and beauty. There are a fearlessness and a lack of equivocation about the handling. But it is not kinematic. A sympathy and insight give the book a glowing and psychological verity.

"Philip Gibbs hates war as, I happen to know, he hates the thought that any personal notoriety (his own word) should come

to him out of it. Yet it is fortunate for himself, as it has been fortunate for us, that he should have been so deeply intrigued with his present psychological phase of development when war came. He has helped to deepen and strengthen our knowledge of the facts of humanity at war, just as war must have helped to deepen and strengthen his knowledge of humanity for all time."



PHILIP GIBBS.

Who sees war in a "naturalistic vision."

It is "humanity at war" in the mud that Mr. Gibbs tells of in a recent letter to the *London Daily Telegraph*. This is the way he describes these winter days of discontent on the Somme front:

"A white fog, dank and moist, lies over the battle-fields, so that our soldiers look like ghosts as they go trudging up to the trenches and disappear into this mistiness. At night all the moisture is turned to hoar-frost, and unless there is a rare gleam of sunlight in the day it does not melt quickly. The broken strands of barbed wire and all the litter of old battles are furred with it, and the breath of marching men is like smoke in the cold air. The men in the trenches are having a hard time. Up in the front lines there are no comfort, no shelter, no rest for them, and they need all their courage and strength to endure their wetness, their coldness, and the foul conditions into which they have been plunged by a month of rain. There is only one cheering thought for them. It is not so bad now as it has been."

There was one German trench that the Canadians greatly desired in November, "because men of a patrol who had been near it came back with glowing stories about it."

"It was, it seemed, one of the old-fashioned sort known to the men before the great advance, eight feet deep, beautifully boarded and revetted, nicely drained, warm, and cozy. 'Ye gods!' said Canadians sitting in mud-boles. 'That's some trench. It would be fine to live in such a place.' 'By gosh!' said other Canadians, 'that's the trench we've got to take, and pretty quick, too.' So on November 18 or 19 those wet, muddy, cold men set out for Desire trench, and fought like devils to get it, and killed many Germans, and got it.

"And then they swore great oaths, and laughed, and coughed, and lay down in the mud, because it had all been a fairy-tale, and instead of the eight-foot ditch and the nice revetting and draining and boarding there were only linked-up shell-holes with dead bodies in the water of them, and, around, a lake of mud."

We Nominate for the Hall of Fame:



PHILIP GIBBS

Because he is by nature a writer, never having been to school or college; because he is the author of half a dozen excellent novels; because he spent four years with the British armies at the fighting front; but chiefly because, as correspondent of the *London Chronicle* and the *New York Times*, he has given to the world some of the most intimate, picturesque, and truthful pen pictures of the Great War