

Books for Study and Leisure Hours

“THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD.”

(By Sir Philip Gibbs.)

This recent book, by the always interesting war correspondent, who wrote early in the war the vivid picture of the “Soul of the War,” deals with its aftermath. The hero is a young demobilised officer who a year ago had contracted one of those marriages which, owing to the difference in social life and outlook of the husband and wife, was not happy in spite of real love on both sides. The time of unrest in England, when a big strike was threatened and strife and civil war in Ireland, is vividly described. The author depicts his hero as standing in the “middle of the road,” seeing the point of view of both sides and sympathising in some degree with both.

“Bertram thought of all the tragedy of life that hadn’t ended with the war. It was still claiming its victims, though peace had come. It had released human passions everywhere, unchained the primitive instincts of the human beast, weakened the nerve-power and controls of civilised life, made a wreck of many lives and hearts.” From a friend in Russia “there were terrible words: ‘Millions are eating nothing but grass and leaves, and not enough of that;’ ‘Typhus is sweeping these people like a scourge.’”

Bertram is for a time separated from his wife. He travels through the different countries—France, Belgium, Germany

and Russia—to write articles for a newspaper on his observations of the feelings and thoughts of the common people. His sister was married before the war to a German, and, staying with her, he sees a great deal of the inner life of Germany and comes in contact with the Prussian military caste and hears their views. A general made the statement, with simple sincerity, “Gott sei dank! Our brave armies were never defeated from first to last.” Needless to say, Bertram could not allow such a statement to pass unchallenged.

In France, the description of life as he saw it and the feeling towards England was a revelation. The picture of conditions in Russia is sad reading. In the market, which was the only place allowed by Lenin for trading, “were other people besides peasants.” Some of them were in peasant dress, but their faces could not disguise a heritage of education and gentility. Others wore the clothes of the old regime, of bourgeoisie and Western fashion—black dresses, frayed and worn and grease-stained; leather boots, down at heel and broken at the toes; hats which had come originally, perhaps, from smart modistes in the Nevsky-Prospekt, or even from Paris; a bit of lace at the throat and wrists. These ladies—for they were that—stood in the market-place holding out the last relics of their former state.”

The book must be read to appreciate the wonderful picture of so many parts

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