

The Year 1909 One of Achievement

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

By ROBERTUS LOVE.

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 sphere have been made. Invention, which in itself is discovery, has gone forward with seven league 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. 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 11th 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, 1908. 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 to talk to obscure other superlative affairs of 1909. There's no use going up in the air over the north pole controversy and proclaiming it as the one and only matter of universal moment in 1909 when aviators this same year have gone up in the air literally and made the aeroplane a thing of actual use.

Man Flies Across Channel.

Let it be not forgotten—it cannot be, for that matter—that on the 25th of July, 1909, A. D., a Frenchman named Louis Bleriot, a man bird, a person of daredevil nerve, a fearless argonaut of the atmosphere, arose from the ground at Calais in France and flew across the English channel to the chalk cliffs of Dover, making the distance of twenty-one miles in forty minutes, beating the steamboat 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. Swimming the English channel, for many years proclaimed as a feat to be featured in nearly every newspaper throughout the world, has taken its place among the back numbered things. Bleriot has flown across the channel. The achievement of this man five months ago flows to the centuries.

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 the 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, hbred 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. Those who laughed last year have hurried this year. Aviation takes its place in 1909 among the exact sciences.

Many of us while we discuss the absorbing question, "Did Cook beat Peary to the pole or is he the most elegant fake of the ages?" have paused to acknowledge to our own consciousness that the "discovery" of the world's upper apex is really a thing of no value to the world's inhabitants. It is known last year and all the years before that the north pole is in the place where it is, wherever that may be, and the fact that one or two men have "got there" at last is immaterial so far as the broad question is concerned. The discovery of the pole bakes no biscuits for hungry mouths. Aeroplanism as exemplified by Orville and Wilbur Wright, by Louis Bleriot, by Glenn H. Curtiss and others who have achieved things therein this year promises in time to become of very great practical value to the round wide world of human beings.

Standing out as mountain peaks from the plains of the twelve-month are these two things, the north pole news and the advance in aviation, but the year has given us from month to month many other things of interest not to be slurred over in passing.

The death list of 1909 is notable. A great poet, a great novelist, a great preacher, a great general and a great editor have died. These are, in the 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. Underlined, red haired, unhandsome, 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 etherealized. The superb masculinity of Swinburne, however, none who has read his poetry can question.

To Swinburne the English language was music. Words were throbbing; syllables were singing strings; sentences were splendid arias of sound. Pre-eminently he was the master of English speech. The harshness of his 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 fend him against the wolf that obsesses the doors of most men of genius. He could live his life and do his work undisturbed 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 stuff which magazine editors accept and pay for—meagrely. 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 laureate'ship. 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 that despot's crimes against humanity.

That settled the matter so far as Swinburne's succession to the laureate'ship 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.

A Consummate Artist.

Swinburne did not need the laureate'ship. His brow was wreathed with the laurel of love and appreciation from millions of hearts throughout the English speaking lands. He was hailed as an artist consummate. To those who know poetry when they meet it face to face Swinburne was the highest living exponent of the art. He was accepted and approved. Nobody was disappointed when another person was made poet laureate. Thousands would have been disappointed had Swinburne been belittled by the "distinction."

This man Swinburne wrote enviously. Much of his poetry is so divinely musical that it may be read aloud, like a chant, with no attention to the thought or the meaning. It has the sweep and roll of a mighty organ melody. He was the one supreme and melodious wizard of word appreciation. The world of action never properly estimated Swinburne, because he was a magnificent minstrel singing a siren music against the iron gates of a clamorous commercialized age.

Yet he had his appreciators. In 1887 the New York Times published in full his tragedy of "Lochner" in advance of its publication in England, called across the sea. It occupied nearly two newspaper pages in the small hand set

type of that period. This indicates in a degree the important place which the poet occupied a score of years before his death.

Swinburne was the poets' poet. He was the bard of protest against the vulgarities of the mob and the vices of the lords of temporal power. But it was as a word musician, in the ultimate estimate, that he made his career. Now that he has passed his sheer artistry in English has become an inheritance to the ages.

George Meredith's Death.

George Meredith, who died May 18, was a British novelist unknown to the ordinary reader, the opposite of the "best seller" sort of story writer. Meredith was a poet also, but it is his fiction which will carry his name down to the elect of future generations. He never was widely read and never will be. The man was an intellectual colossus, too big for the assimilation of the average brain. It is difficult for a mouse 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 1859, the same year that gave us to "A Tale of Two Cities" by Dickens, "Adam Bede" by George Eliot and "The Virginians" by William Makepeace Thackeray. Meredith's book, "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel," attracted little popular attention, though diving 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 popular acceptance. It is rather too much on the Browningsque order. As

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 metrical and musical adaptability.

Meredith was poor in his youth, saddled with debts incurred by others, and it is said that for nearly a year he lived in London principally on oatmeal. He possessed a brave and unconquerable spirit. He wrote all his writing in a style which he knew was unpopular. He conceived it as an ideal and adhered to it. Meredith was great enough to fling convention to the winds in his literary work and abide by the slow result of time, which has not been unkind to him.

Dr. Hale's Long Career.

The first of a trio of distinguished Americans who died in 1909 was the Rev. Dr. Edward Everett Hale. Dr. Hale passed away June 10 at his home in Massachusetts. He was eighty-seven years old and had been for many years one of the most beloved of all Americans. As a Unitarian preacher he won wide recognition in early life, but it was his literary and lecturing which gained for him his widest repute. Dr. Hale was the author of "The Man Without a Country," one of the most remarkable short stories ever written. It is a classic of American patriotism. For years up to his death, Dr. Hale was chaplain of the United States senate.

To know Edward Everett Hale was to love him. "Do you love this old man?" was the legend starting from an advertising card that bore a picture of Dr. Hale, posted in street cars all over the United States, in exploiting a magazine for which he wrote. Everybody loved that old man, whose kindly countenance for much more than half a century had illumined the homes of New England. Dr. Hale was one of the old timers. He was an intimate of the famous group of New England poets and essayists. He had a kindly philosophy of life which endeared him to the public. When he died it seemed as if an age had ended.

Honored in War and Peace.

The most distinguished survivor of the civil war, General Oliver Otis Howard, finished his career Oct. 26 at his home in Burlington, Vt. General Howard commanded the Union forces at the battle of Gettysburg for a short time during that terrible conflict. He was in command at the fierce battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg. At Fair Oaks he lost his right arm. On Sherman's march to the sea General Howard was in command of the right wing of the Army of the Tennessee. He fought in twenty great battles. After the war his services in Indian campaigns in the west gave him wide renown.

General Howard was known as "the Christian soldier." Like Stonewall Jackson on the southern side, he was a devout Christian. General Howard was made commissioner of the Freedmen's bureau in 1865. His work in behalf of the liberated slaves occupied several years. For four years he was president of Howard university, established in Washington and named for him, its aim being the higher education of the negro. General Howard founded in Cumberland Gap, Tenn., for the education of the poor boys in the mountain regions. He lived to the age of seventy-nine and retained to the last his amelioration of distress and the ardor of his career. General Howard was ample to men in this money mad era. He loved humanity and lived for it, as he would have died for it in wartime. He had the bullets reached vital parts.

A great editor was lost to the world when Richard Watson Gilder died in November. Mr. Gilder had been for twenty-eight years editor in chief of 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 attitudes of great 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 a 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 smoothed 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. Magoon as provisional governor. In order to keep peace in the island, the first republic under President Palma, had failed to come up to the standard, and this country had to intervene. Since the inauguration of President Gomez the Cuban republic has run along smoothly.

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 6th, 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 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. Prisoners of war are not lined up and shot in this country.

Philander 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.

This incident, coming in the closing month of the year, is the only ripple upon the surface of peace in relation to our own land for the twelve-month.

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 wrung from the monarchical government a constitution, so that Turkey now takes her place, or promises to take it, as a free nation. The revolution of the world, which cherishes and maintains 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.

Like the soul of John Brown, the fortieth anniversary of whose execution was observed in America Dec. 2, that of Francisco Ferrer promises to go marching on.

Happily no catastrophes of universal horror have marred the year, though 1909 missed by only three days that most stupendous disaster of all time, the earthquake which destroyed Messina and other Italian cities and blotted out about 200,000 lives. By 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 earthquake and its results.

In the United States the most appalling disaster of the year was the fire in a coal mine at Cherry, Ill., in November, by which 290 miners lost their lives. Twenty of the imprisoned men were saved after a week's suffering in the air poisoned chambers. Their rescue was due to the work of the rescue corps of the United States geological survey, a new service, here put to practical test for the first time.