

NOTES

By Eileen Duggan

"The Wandering Years"

This is the fourth of the series by which Katherine Tynan is giving her memories to the world. Memoirs are always curious things. They can be written in a style that is stately and dull, or they can be written in a style that is intimate and confiding. The third method is that used by most French diarists (save perhaps one exuberant lady, who revealed her mind with an embarrassing frankness). It is that of the amused spectator of life who merely shrugs a shoulder or withdraws a delicate skirt if naked joy or sorrow come too near. Katherine Tynan is of the manner of Mr. Pepys. That does not imply that she shared his moral code. In morals she is impeccable. It is in her frankness, her utter egotism, her innocent delight in her own gifts, her own praises, in her even more innocent assumption that the whole world finds them an absorbing topic that she resembles that artless diarist.

She has, too, that shrewdness for worldly values that Pepys possessed and, breathe it low, she dearly loves a lord. It is the old story of Art yearning after Aristocracy, and Aristocracy yearning after Art. One seldom finds one in the ranks of the other. Like the Lord of all beauty the makers of beauty step out from the mews or the cottage. A title seems to kill creative power. Yet the two worlds inter-mingle. Each possesses for the other the charm of mystery, the lure of the unknown. Katherine Tynan is at least a faithful recorder. She sets down her snubs as well as her praises. There are fewer notabilities in this fourth book. One guesses that notabilities are becoming dumb before the race who take notes. Margot Asquith and others of her ilk have done the world a service. She jeopardised her humility to do it certainly, but in social and literary circles there will be less foolish, false flattery in the future. It was poetic justice. If men flatter in secret they must expect to feel foolish when the trusting pen of the flattered records their honeyed phrases. There were many sore heads in England when their bread returned to them from the waters. There can be no doubt that the diarists believe all the praises they have received.

Extracts

In this book the authoress has a personal grief to tell. She lost her husband, an R.M., one of Aberdeen's men, in Mayo. She touches on this matter with reticence, but it meant to her the loss of her home as well, and it added to her responsibilities. She gives as in the other books a full account of her children. The eldest, Toby, married a niece of the Esmondess. The younger, Pat, entered the army, the English army, but resigned later. Pamela, the daughter, accompanied her mother on the round of visits with which the book is chiefly concerned. Several of the homes they visited belonged to the officers of the Army of Occupation in Mayo. From there she would visit the House of Glendalough, the home of Robert Barton. To illus-

trate her versatility she tells an anecdote of a visit from Erskine Childers. She asked him to put his name in the visitors' book. He opened it at a page full of Scottish Borderers. She said gaily "Oh that's to show the military if they call. We want yours to show the volunteers."

She missed Ireland in its agony, and she left England for Ireland in the wartime after many years' residence there. So she missed both the Zeppelins and the Auxiliaries. How many in either country could say the same?

Of one great Irish Doctor she gives a fine picture. This was the dear old Quixote, Dick Tobin, who, though they were opposed in views, sheltered the family of James Connolly. He declared that no man should bear bitterness. Of his own son he said, "When my boy sits down in Paradise I pray that the Turk who killed him may sit down beside him." Perhaps it was that that drew him to Connolly. He attended his wounds, and was with him to the end. "Connolly," he said to him then, "will you pray for the men who are about to shoot you?" Connolly smiled, a warm, sad smile, "I pray for all brave men who do their duty according to their lights." Greatheart to Greatheart. Of the European War she tells many anecdotes gleaned from her son, Pat. The other son seems to have been more reticent. Perhaps he did not like print.

Then she and Pamela went to England. They met there the Meynells, the Chestertons, Rose Macaulay, May Sinclair, Muriel Stuart, a young poetess, and Theodore Maynard. Very few anecdotes this time, very few! Everard Meynell's little son thought Pam very beautiful. They met, too, through the Aberdeens, the veteran stationmaster Mr. Jones, a jewel of stationmasters who was very useful to them on many occasions. This is a letter from the maid to the mistress:—
"... He took two turns with us up and down, and I could have sunk into the earth with shame to think of it. The cook was fit to drop. She looked wasting away, but when he began to praise you and Miss Pam—he couldn't find words enough for that graceful child—I just turned round and told what you said of him... The loveliest beaming smile came over his noble countenance: you could see he was pleased and well pleased."

Perhaps he really was pleased, but the race she sprang from gives praise gracefully, not in such sickening measures. That letter, if it were not humorous, would be nauseating.

In Ireland again they visited Dunsany, Dunsany back from America, and glowing with pleasure over the appreciation of art shown there. Dunsany had been very short with a provincial Philistine. Let the writer tell it! She says with the utmost simplicity, "He said he was avenging Keats and me—which inclusion could only be attributed to his goodwill."

There is much of the Linlithgow's too, praise upon praise. More even in this book than of the Aberdeens'.

Another visit to England! This time they met Clement Shorter, who was once privi-

leged to be the husband of Dora Sigerson, and they met John Burnas, the veteran of Labor. Arnold Bennett at literary gatherings kept saying, "Remember Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson is in the room." She liked him well enough, but their standards clashed inevitably. If he meant she did not enjoy sex topics it was a tribute, and she should not feel hurt; but he probably meant only that a memoirist was present and that some of the sayings might recoil on them.

"I think," she said, "he thought me very much of a country cousin. Once I broke into his conversation with a very artistic lady. They were discussing Brabazon. 'Is that the Sussex artist?' I asked humbly. He waved me away indulgently and went on with the conversation. 'Well, he may not be the Sussex artist,' I persisted, 'but I know the house in Sussex which contains more Brabazons than any other building in the world, and I can go there any day I like. In fact I am especially asked to see the Brabazons with other things.' It was the score of the country mouse she says. One wonders!

Some of her descriptions are very charming. She chaperoned a party to Italy. This is a wonderful description of San Niccolo. "The children kept wandering in and out, like the birds that fly in at the open door and out again. Unlike the great Florentine churches, San Niccolo is warm, because the sun comes in and the warm wind. There was the sound of the dragging feet of very young children. In the porch and on the steps there was a chattering of children, like so many sparrows under the eaves. It was Palm Sunday, and the children, soft as pansies or dark roses, came down from the altar, their arms full of palms."

Katherine Tynan has ended by pleasing neither country. To the English she is a Sinn Feiner, to the Irish a West Briton. She knows it. It came home to her at a certain literary dinner...

"Quite suddenly I experienced the strangest desolation. I might almost say the lights burned blue... 'When I forget thee, O Jerusalem!' The cry of the Psalmist echoed loudly on my heart. To think that my country was in her agony and that I was expected to amuse these friendly English people who would begin to laugh the moment I opened my mouth, because I had a brogue."

If I had stood up and said 'My country is dying,' they would have laughed, or I thought they would. There were good Irish there, and good friends of Ireland, but I had gone out into the desert. What did I do there 'in a foreign land, in a lonesome city'?"

She went home to Ireland after that, and the fifth volume of her memories has been published.

ADVICE TO PARENTS.

We have just received the latest Musical Novelty—"The Canary Songster"—considered to be the best and strongest musical toy ever made for children. Send postal note for 2/6 and receive this by return post. —ALLAN YOUNG, LTD., 17, The Octagon, Dunedin.