

Esther Gould's Book Corner

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GLOOMY, INDEED!

"THE SHADOW OF THE GLOOMY EAST"

By Ferdinand A. Ossendowski
E. P. Dutton & Co.

Ossendowski has not written another "Beasts, Men and Gods" in this, his latest book "The Shadow of the Gloomy East." His subject matter is not so startling, so spectacular, nor is the narrative so continuous. Instead of the story of a mad escape through countries almost unknown to us, this is vivid and indeed sufficiently startling sketches of experiences in at least partly known places—various provinces of Russia.

Dr. Ossendowski considers the East itself a "gloomy shadow." And so it looms in his book—like the cloud which rises up from a forest fire and in an instant seems to envelop the whole sky. And the elements of the forest fire are Bolshevism, Russian mysticism, strange distorted forms of witchcraft and a state of mind which leads to utter desperation and despair.

In speaking of this mental conflagration the author says: "The people are bending beneath its horrors. Drug-doping and self-immolation of the most insane kind are spreading. . . . So they cut their throats, hang themselves in barns and forests, drown themselves in rivers and marshy lakes, pour boiling water over themselves, swallow poison, or fling themselves into flames."

While reading such statements one must, to keep one's sense of balance remember Dr. Ossendowski's own definition of his works when he was confronted by scientists, that he wrote not as a scientist but as an artist. One cannot help feeling that he has done what so many modern artists do, exaggerate for the sake of emphasis. Real and vivid as are the sketches one cannot believe that the conditions they portray are as general as he would have us believe.

But in any case Dr. Ossendowski has written a brilliant book. He recounts his experiences in Russian villages where witchcraft and heathen practices are paramount, where perverted sects like the "floggers" carry on their mad rites, where it is a common custom for young girls, bound in a lonely forest to "marry the Devil." Devil worship has its priestesses and its priests and "numbers a great many professors, and disposes of large and ever increasing funds."

Dr. Ossendowski then goes on to the state of mind of the so-called intelligentsia, of the Royal family and the nobility before the War, he leaves no part of the complex nation untouched. The impression of the book is like the lurid reflection that a great fire throws on the under side of its own smoke cloud.

A GOOD STORY

"THIS MAD IDEAL"

By Floyd Dell Alfred A. Knopf

Floyd Dell can certainly tell a story. He has an ease of motion which sweeps one along from the first page to the last. In "This Mad Ideal" the motion is not quite as sure and compelling as in Mr. Dell's first novel "Moon Calf." Perhaps having been a boy himself he is able to carry us along a little more surely with Felix Fay than with Judith Valentine.

The theme of the two books is the same. Those who would fly high must fly alone. They must be free from the entangling alliances which enmesh ordinary people. They may pause in their flight for a day—an hour, but they must go on.

Judith Valentine knew that almost before she knew that she knew it, when her only sympathetic friend, the doctor who had saved her from lifelong invalidism, told her that he was running away with the woman he loved. But "Perhaps I shan't even be a doctor any more. It's taken something out of me all this . . . And Judy

—if you hear that I've become a bum, selling patent medicines on the street for a living—just remember, if you can, how it all happened."

She falls in love with Roy—a shy inarticulate artist whom she keeps afloat by her own efforts as one would keep a bit of dandelion fluff in the air on a windless summer day. Then comes the moment of final decision. "She stood looking down at him, pitying him, pitying herself. They loved each other. If she married him, their striving would be over. They would stop trying to do impossible things. They would be content with each other."

Judy's mother and father had realized that in marriage something was surrendered and they had rebelled. But in rebelling they both went down. Yet Judy persists in this "mad ideal."

"They had ambitions. They had condemned themselves to be tossed about in loneliness forever on a sea

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of vague unrest. Why . . . Why not be happy, like other people?"

A word would awaken him and bring him to her but Judy cannot speak it. "She waited a moment longer and then turned and went softly out of the room."

A NUTTY PUN

"I call that a bit of perfect casting," said director Roland West, when he was making "The Monster," the Metro-Goldwyn picture. "For the role of 'Daffy Dan' I have cast Knute Erickson with the accent on the 'nut.'"

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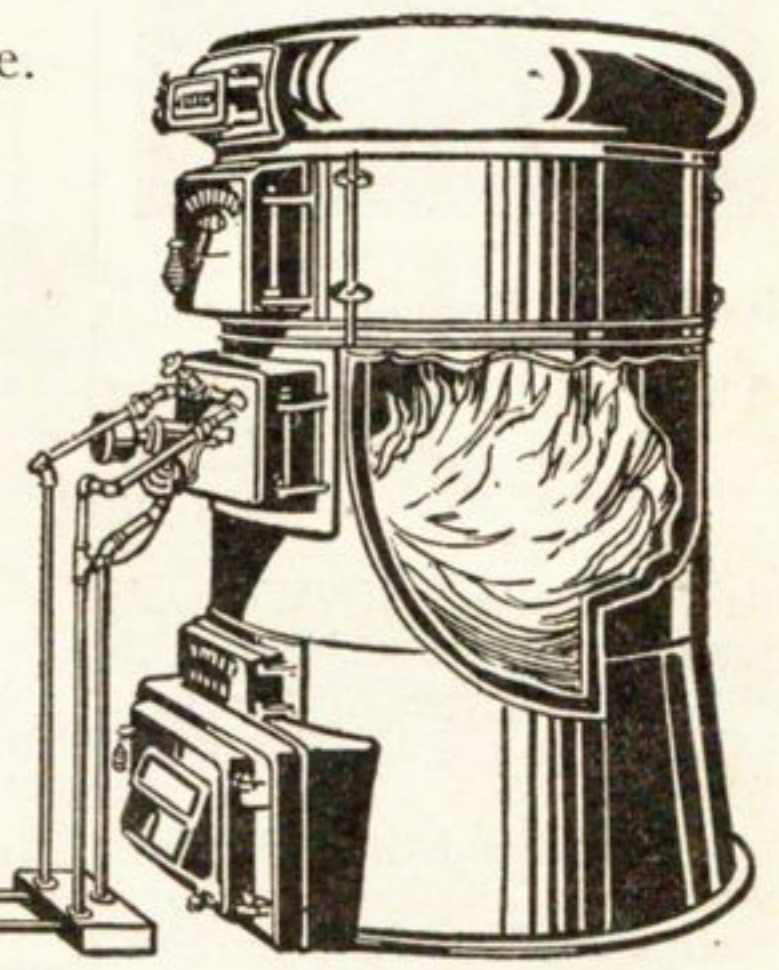
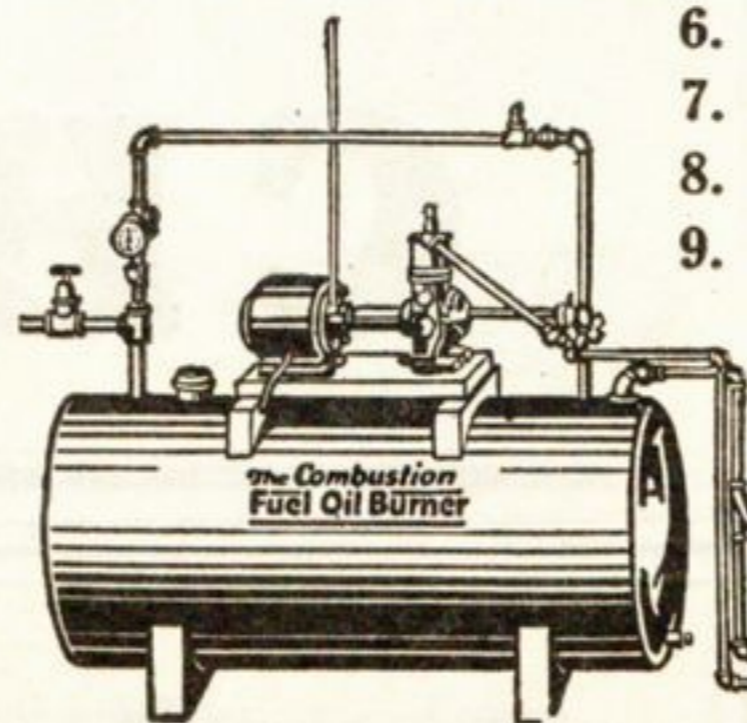
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