

RUNAWAY RUSSIA. By Florence MacLeod
Harper. Century; \$2.

This book is apparently the little revised diary of a very brave but wholly indiscriminating woman. She arrived in Russia "during the old régime"; she was "there during the inauguration of the new one." So much the preface tells us. Perhaps the "old régime" refers to the Czar, perhaps to Kerensky. Incredible as it may seem, there is not a word in the entire volume to show which. Possibly the Czar fell during the early pages of the book; if so, this was less important than the vicissitudes to which the Astoria Hotel, at which the author lodged, was subjected. Perhaps he had fallen before the book commences: Mrs. Harper does not consider it worth while to let us into the secret. After seventy printed pages there is a casual reference to "the Provisional Government"; and Kerensky enters the picture for the first time in the fourteenth chapter, though his name manages to stray into print earlier along with more weighty affairs—Mrs. Pankhurst, the price of caviar, the quality of wool, the cost of taxicabbing, Botchkarova, the difficulty of assembling a bridge foursome in Petrograd, servant troubles. The book, according to the publishers, "presents the Russian revolution as seen through a woman's eyes." Mrs. Harper seems to have seen everything except the revolution. This is a calamity. The author exposed herself to the most fearful personal risks; all that she has to show for it is a mass of trivialities, gossip, small talk, information of no lasting value. Occasionally a bit of worth-while matter intrudes—but it intrudes.

When one has finished the book one has learnt the most embarrassingly intimate details about the author, but very, very little about Russia, runaway or otherwise. One knows, for instance, that Mrs. Harper bathes frequently, even on trains; that she is fond of cheese, wears washable

silk underwear, smokes cigarettes, dispenses with garters, and is given to untactful remarks, thus: "Upon rejoining my Bolshevik friends, I remarked that it was strange that the dome of the cathedral still remained, because it was covered with beaten gold, and as they had not hesitated to murder, I did not see why they should hesitate to steal. . . . Several black looks greeted me. . . . After that none of them spoke to me." All this one learns about Florence MacLeod Harper. But the Czar? Kerensky? Lenine? Trotsky? These are flittingly unimportant figures in the misty outskirts of her narrative. The book should never have been called "Runaway Russia"; it should have been called "Runaway Florence."