

# GERHART HAUPTMANN

By Harry Salpeter

THE world knows Gerhart Hauptmann as dramatist and, largely because of the nature of some of his dramas, as poet. When, in 1912, at the age of fifty, he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, it was "principally for his rich, versatile and prominent activity in the realm of the drama". It could hardly have been for any other activity, for by that year he had written twenty-four dramas, two stories, one book of travel reflections, an epic poem, an indiscretion of his fumbling, unorientated youth which he tried hard to recall; one quite terrible novel, "Atlantis", and one which was quite good, though overlong, "The Fool in Christ". He had not yet written "The Heretic of Soana" or "The Island of the Great Mother". That was left for the ripe maturity of his late fifties. Mention the name of Gerhart Hauptmann in any fairly intelligent assemblage outside of the German-speaking nations and that name will conjure up the names of these of his dramas: "Lonely Lives", "The Weavers", "Hannele" and "The Sunken Bell"—but, above all, "The Sunken Bell", that lovely allegory of the artist's failure to free himself utterly from the tangle of conventionalized obligations, that he might climb to the heights towards which his vision pointed. "The Heretic of Soana" is to Gerhart Hauptmann's prose fiction what "The Sunken Bell" is to his poetical dramas.

Hauptmann is so impressionable as a human being that, as a writer, he cannot help being autobiographical, except possibly when dealing purely with legend, as in "Henry of Auë", or with historical events, as in that other play, "Florian Geyer", or with fantastic Utopianism, as in his latest novel, "The Island of the Great Mother". And even when he works with symbols, or embroiders legend, it is himself—his problems, desires and doubts—which determines the choice and treatment of legend, the working out of symbol. A play, or a novel, of Haupt-

mann's need not be autobiographical in events—so obviously and crassly autobiographical as "Atlantis"—but it will be so at least in the mood reflected, in which sense the defeatist "The Sunken Bell" is autobiographical. It is this sensitivity, this impressionableness, which made him, at the beginning of his career, a leader of the naturalist movement with his Ibsen-Zola-Tolstoi plays, and it was that quality which later made him give the perfect expression that he did to the idealist, poetical-pictorial drama when Naturalism seemed to have run its course. Because of his responsiveness, his creative work has been called "a history of influences, good and bad". One reads Hauptmann's works to read Hauptmann's life. His works have been his confessions, sometimes of such a direct character that they have sounded like indiscretions, but, sometimes in confessing himself he has confessed Humanity. His career has not had the consistency, the undeviating direction of a Shaw or a Hardy, and we cannot know from one creation to the next exactly where we shall find him, nor what he will confess, what imply, nor what mood convey. And in most of his later works one reads good news: that Gerhart Hauptmann has seemed to reach that summit toward which Heinrich the bell-founder struggled in vain.

If I insist upon the autobiographical significance of the mood in which his later serene works are steeped, it is because a study of the life and work of Hauptmann has led me to believe that you cannot separate the work from the life. Such a study also has made manifest the rarity of such moods in Hauptmann. In small things, no less than in large, work reflects life; were all the material for his biography destroyed and only his books left, one yet could reconstruct, perhaps painfully, a spiritually accurate "life" from plays and poems and novels. I do not believe that many great artists have

so fully and obviously exploited themselves as has Gerhart Hauptmann. Does this mean that he lacks imaginative resources? Not if he uses himself, his experiences, his soil, richly, significantly, imaginatively, as he sometimes, but not often or consistently, does. His art perhaps might have had a wider appeal and a closer approach to universality had he caught early and held long the mood, the spirit, which is the main characteristic and distinction of, chiefly, "The Heretic of Soana".

For example, the domestic difficulties of Hauptmann have been woven into the fabric of many of his plays and certainly of one novel; transmuted somewhat, no doubt, but yet determining the choice of material and the treatment, a treatment dictating tragedy and death as brother conclusions. The inability of an artist to transcend himself may yield either great or feeble work. That sensitivity to human suffering which makes a man poet-advocate of a submerged class, as in "The Weavers"; of the children of the poor, as in "Hannele"; and of defenceless women upon whom men prey, as in "Rose Bernd"—such a sensitivity may incline the poet-dramatist to dwell with a possibly morbid emphasis upon his own private difficulties. Those who are most capable of pitying others are not beyond the suspicion of exaggerating the occasions for self-pity. Even the symbolical "Henry of Auë", based on the legend of the leprous knight whom the devotion of the lovely virgin restored to health, constitutes a highly-pitched symbolization of a chapter in Hauptmann's life. In "Michael Kramer", which preceded "Henry of Auë" by some years, Hauptmann dwelt upon the tragedy of ugliness, with the consequent shunning of society. Hauptmann himself, we are informed, had withdrawn himself from the world, and in "Phantom", the novel, Hauptmann returned to the theme of an ugly youth thirsting for love and glory as a poet. Time and again he has dwelt upon the theme of regeneration through the alchemy of love. Note "Henry of Auë" and "Wayland", among the most obvious examples in drama; in "Phantom" and "Atlantis" in fiction. He has dwelt upon that theme in its physical and spiritual implications. His

return to that theme has significance in his spiritual autobiography.

The spiritual conflict in Hauptmann's early married life is perhaps too faithfully mirrored in the chief character of "Atlantis", Dr. Frederick von Kammacher who is fleeing to the new world to escape his wife. There is Gabriel Schilling, in "Gabriel Schilling's Flight" (a play which was withheld from public presentation for many years after it had been written), running away from his wife and drowning. There is Johannes Vockerat (in "Lonely Lives"), who, torn between the legal tie which binds him to his unsympathetic wife and his love for the "new" woman, solves the problem by suicide. Karl Holl, in his study of Hauptmann, indicates that the dramatist worked out in his own life the problem of one man torn between two women somewhat more happily than did Johannes Vockerat. Even "The Sunken Bell", that apparently unalloyed sublimation of the artist's struggle upward, derives much of its motivation from Hauptmann's personal drama, for Rautendelein, the lovely woodland sprite, has been declared to be the idealized projection of the woman who became Hauptmann's second wife, and Magda, one of the voices of valley duty, is supposed to have been intended for a representation of Hauptmann's first wife. Even the story of his first courtship has not been unemployed, for in "The Maidens of the Mount", Hauptmann reconstructed, in a mood of melancholy recollection, the days when he and his two brothers courted in their mountain home the three sisters whom they later married.

Hauptmann's marital troubles, however, do not serve as the only key to Hauptmann's work. His life, until even after his fiftieth year, when he won the Nobel prize, has exemplified drift rather than mastery. His life has been characterized, from its beginnings, by tentative gropings, by experiments the failure or the success of which he was rarely able to distinguish in advance of public presentation. In some men change in the medium of expression denotes the prodigality and many-faceted quality of genius; in Hauptmann, I believe, such shifts indicate lack of assurance. For in some of his plays

the form chosen to express an intention was not suited to it, and yet Hauptmann is too great a writer to be content with filling a dramatic mould. He wants to say something. The drama is supposed to be the medium best suited for the wide dissemination of that which one wants to say, but Hauptmann has not always managed the dramatic form so well for his purpose as Shaw, for example, has managed it for his.

## II

Gerhart Hauptmann was born on November 15, 1862, at Obersalzbrunn, in Silesia. His father was an innkeeper. It may or may not be significant that his first play ("Before Sunrise") among others, points the horrible consequences of congenital alcoholism and that Hauptmann was for some time a staunch Prohibitionist. In the case of so impressionable a young man, Hauptmann's direct and indirect emphasis on sobriety must bear some reference to his early years. Hauptmann's grandfather was a weaver, a witness, if not a participant, of the terrible uprising of 1844 which Hauptmann later attempted to mirror in "The Weavers". This he dedicated to his father, from whom he had heard about the uprising. Gerhart was kept at home until 1874. His mother was a gentle woman and a devout Christian and it may have been from her that he derived the religio-mystical strain in his character, a strain which may have been strengthened later during his residence with an uncle whose home was a fortress of the Moravian faith, where also he heard the music of Bach and Händel. From "Hannele" (1893) through "Commemoration Masque" (1913) to "Wayland" (1925), the mystic has been an obvious element in the compound which is the artist Hauptmann. In that man who wrote "Hannele" and "The Fool in Christ," on one hand, and "The Sunken Bell" and "The Heretic of Soana", on the other, the conflict between Christian and pagan must sometimes have shaken to its foundations the soul which was the stage of combat. From the beginning, Gerhart was curious and bookish, imaginative and nature-loving. That he was a bad student is a fact consistent with his young nature. In 1874 he was sent to

Breslau, to a secondary school. His father's ill-fortune cut short those days. When Gerhart returned to Breslau, it was to the Royal College of Art, where he specialized in sculpture. He was there until the spring of 1882, modelling and writing his fledgling dramas. It is to this period that we may refer "Colleague Crampton", the comedy about an inebriate art teacher and "Michael Kramer", the tragedy of an unsuccessful artist. Thereafter Gerhart followed his brother Carl at the University of Jena. Carl, who became a scientist of some distinction, has left several volumes of poetry and drama, the value of which his famous brother's work seems to have eclipsed. At Jena, Gerhart specialized in philosophy and the natural sciences, attending lectures by Haeckel and Eucken. Subsequently he studied psychiatry with Forel at Zürich. Although these lectures are supposed to have left their mark on the impressionable Gerhart, the university did not long hold him. He embarked on a Mediterranean tour, following, for part of the way, in Childe Harold's footsteps. He stayed in Rome and Capri awhile. The fruit of this journey was an epic, his first work, "Promethidenlos" (1885). This, like "Atlantis", is crassly autobiographical. His first hero, Selin, being undecided what career to adopt and torn between sculpture and poetry, ends it all by drowning. Indecision, between careers, or between women, or between destinies, was to be a characteristic of some of his heroes.

Following his voyage, Gerhart visited the sisters who later became betrothed to the Hauptmann brothers. Following his engagement he entered the Art Academy at Dresden, continuing his studies in sculpture. He returned to Rome, married at Dresden, went to live at Erkner, a Berlin suburb, freed by his wife's fortune from the necessity of earning a living. Apparently, he abandoned his art studies. He decided to become an actor, but gave it up. He had a lisp. Spitta, the unsuccessful actor in "The Rats", which Hauptmann wrote years afterward, also had a lisp, as well as a theory of the drama—a theory which Hauptmann had been able to put into practice with some measure of success.

The turn in his career was coming. He was to write a drama which was to bear the same relation to the literature of his period that the production of Victor Hugo's "Hernani" bore to his. The success of this first drama was to put Hauptmann under the happy compulsion of becoming Germany's foremost dramatist. Gerhart Hauptmann was almost thirty before he found himself. He found himself with a vengeance. And because he found himself for the time—impressionable man that he was—in tune with a movement which was to be the center of a wide controversy, that movement raised him on its shoulders for all the world to see.

Up to about the time of his marriage Hauptmann had been largely under the suzerainty of Byron. New influences were intervening. His studies at Jena were bearing fruit. At Erkner he read omnivorously in science and sociology—Darwin, Karl Marx, Saint-Simon, among others. He was responding also to the intellectual air-currents blowing in from the French naturalists, the Russians, the Scandinavians; Ibsen, Zola, Strindberg, Tolstoy and the Goncourt brothers, who had formulated the creed of Naturalism: "The modern—everything for the artist is there: in the sensation, the intuition of the contemporary, of this spectacle of life with which one rubs elbows!" With Arno Holz and other spokesmen of the naturalistic creed Hauptmann maintained constant touch. When *Die Freie Bühne*—the Free Stage—was organized to give representation to the new drama, Hauptmann offered his first play, "Before Sunrise". It was produced at the Deutsches Theater, following Ibsen's "Ghosts". "Before Sunrise" established Hauptmann as a leader of the naturalistic movement in Germany. This play no more foreshadowed "The Sunken Bell" than James Joyce's "Chamber Music" could have foreshadowed "Ulysses".

Before Hauptmann's first play was produced, he had published "Flagman Thiel", a story stemming from Zola, which he later developed into one of his best plays, "Drayman Henschel". One year after the production of "Before Sunrise", in which the dominant influence of Tolstoy was perceived, he published another story, "The Apostle",

which had a religious eccentric of the time as its model. Hauptmann's "The Fool in Christ", one of his earliest novels, must have been the development of "The Apostle", which story Dr. Otto Heller regards as "the signal of deliverance from Naturalism".

Because he began his career as the dramatist of Naturalism, it was inevitable that the young Hauptmann should have had every one of his early works compared with the works of his elders. Not only was his "Flagman Thiel" Zola and "Before Sunrise" Tolstoy, but his second play, "The Reconciliation" was Ibsen; his third, "Lonely Lives" was Ibsen, and not merely Ibsen, but "Rosmersholm". It was with "The Weavers" (1892) that Hauptmann was to strike his first original note and even that has been damned as a pamphlet play, dramatizing the quality of Hunger rather than the quality of human beings. Following "Colleague Crampton", a comedy redolent of Molière, and "The Beaver Coat", a comedy pillorying bureaucracy, came "Hannele", one of those rare plays in which Hauptmann does not remind us of some other dramatist. First of his semi-lyrical dramas, "Hannele" may be regarded as the bridge that Hauptmann was to cross on his way from naturalism to mysticism and poetry, the qualities he was to express later in such works as "Elga" (like "Hannele", a dream-play); in "The Sunken Bell", in "Henry of Auë", among others.

### III

Hauptmann's first six plays, those before "Hannele", were naturalistic. The six plays that followed "The Sunken Bell" were so evenly divided between the realistic and the idealistic, that, to quote Dr. Heller, "it would be obviously unfair to regard Hauptmann either any longer as an obdurate disciple of Naturalism, or as an apostate from its principles". In Germany the reign of Naturalism in the drama had come to an end. In 1893 the success of such poetic legendry as Ludwig Fulda's "The Talisman" and of the opera "Hänsel and Gretel" prepared the way, if not for "Hannele", at least for "The Sunken Bell", which probably did not require trail-blazing. The star of Maeterlinck

was in the ascendant; and about the time "The Sunken Bell" was produced, "Cyrano" enthralled Paris.

After "The Sunken Bell" came "Drayman Henschel", one of the greatest peasant tragedies ever written; "Schluck and Jau", Shakespearian farce; "Michael Kramer", naturalistic tragedy; "The Beaver Coat" and "The Conflagration", linked rogues' comedies; "Henry of Auë", poetic legendary drama; "Rose Bernd", return to realistic tragedy; "And Pippa Dances", in the symbolic vein; "The Maidens of the Mount", recollection in melancholy; "Charlemagne's Hostage", historical drama; "Griselda", a modern view of legend; "The Rats", serio-comedy; "Gabriel Schilling's Flight", drama of autobiography in naturalistic vein; "Commemoration Masque", mystical puppet show. More recently he has produced, in the dramatic mould, "Dorothea Angermann", naturalist drama in which, for two acts, he returns to America; and a revision of "Hamlet" with Hamlet as a man of action; "Wayland", a play based on the Vulcan of Northern mythology; also "Anna", a rural love poem, and a modernization of Till Eulenspiegel, a symbolical epic in hexameters in which the old rogue is made to revisit post-war Germany.

I have not, of course, listed all that Hauptmann has written, but enough to show either the wide variety of his themes and his treatment, or else the inconstancy of his expression. On the stage many of his plays have been failures. It has been pointed out that many of his dramas have a deeper and wider appeal as reading matter than as matter for stage representation. A number of critics have dared the wrath of the Hauptmann cult by suggesting that because Gerhart Hauptmann writes dramas it does not follow that he is, therefore, a dramatist; that he lacks the vocation. And among those who concur in this view there is concurrence also in the view that Hauptmann's plays show what an excellent novelist he might have made. Ashley Dukes writes: "To say that many of his plays stamp him as a novelist who has wandered into the theatre by mistake is not to belittle his power as an imaginative writer. . . . Hauptmann is one of the most gifted

of living writers but the style in his case is not adapted first and foremost to the service of drama". Of some of his plays he writes: "They would have been far completer works of art in the form of novels". And after listing the various methods of dramatic writing amongst which, in his view, Hauptmann has wavered, Mr. Dukes says: "This may be called versatility, but it has more than a suspicion of the versatility of the weathercock". Because Hauptmann writes plays, says Dr. Heller, he has been called, "through a natural fallacy of public opinion", Germany's greatest dramatist. Hauptmann has not been insensitive to such strictures. One of the supposed motives behind the writing of "Michael Kramer", one of his best plays in the tragic vein, was to give the lie to such critics as Richard M. Meyer who had written that Hauptmann lacked "the higher intellect, the mastery in the realm of ideas, the power to deal with the abstract, the quick flash that lights up the mystery of things". And in an autobiographical sketch published before 1914, Hauptmann attempted to justify his almost exclusive concern with the drama, half-heartedly confessing, by implication, the possibility that there might be some justice in the contention that the drama was not his happiest vocation.

Toward the conclusion of his essay on Hauptmann, Prof. Heller writes:

"Hauptmann, in cultivating the drama to the exclusion of every other literary form, lets the richest acres of his genius lie fallow, and we plead, in extenuation of the critical attitude taken, a certain resentful sense of disappointment. Nietzsche once said of Wagner: 'I believe it often happens that artists do not often realize what they are best able to do because they are too vain.' One cannot help pointing the aphorism at Hauptmann. . . . He could be the prince of modern lyrists if he would. That is why we clamor for songs from him".

I am inclined to believe that Hauptmann has already given us such songs—songs in narrative prose celebrating the serenity of maturity and strengthening his claim to posterity's attention.



# A DECADE OF CHANGE

*Letters of Wm. Dean Howells, 1880-1889*

WOULD it be too much to assert that after 1880 the New England tradition was in its death throes, that it was perishing slowly but perceptibly, and that a newer, less disciplined and more emphatic literature was beginning to lay its foundations? The work of Emerson was done; he was passing through that sad twilight of the mind that was to end in death in 1882. Longfellow was to die in this same year, Bryant had died in 1878, Richard Henry Dana in 1879, his son in 1882, James T. Fields in 1881, Bayard Taylor in 1878, and Motley in 1877. A few figures lasted on into the 1890's—Holmes, Whittier, Bancroft, and Lowell among them—but their best work was done. The new generation was of a different calibre. During these 1880's change and travel exerted their influence on William Dean Howells. In 1881 he resigned as editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He was his own master now and no longer tied to the responsibilities of routine editorial labors. His creative vein, mellowed and matured, was at its highest power, and this decade witnessed the publication of many excellent fictional studies, among them "The Rise of Silas Lapham" and "A Hazard of New Fortunes".

Various opportunities were offered Howells, among them the literary editorship of the *New York Tribune* (1881), the professorship of literature at Johns Hopkins University (1882), and the Smith Professorship of French and Spanish Languages and Literature at Harvard. He refused them all. Part of this period was spent in travel, a Swiss sojourn, a summer in London, and wanderings through his beloved Italy. This travel resulted in some of his most delightful sketches.

During this period, too, Howells gave ample evidence of where he stood in the economic development of the United States. We are apt to think of him as a mild-mannered

man and gentle-souled editor but he was more than that. His intuitions were essentially of the progressive order, and while his disciplined mind would not permit his feelings to carry him too far he yet made his position manifest. There is an illuminating paragraph in Mary and Charles Beard's "The Rise of American Civilization" that gives a fair summing up of the Howells of the 1880's and it may well be set down here:

"Early drawn into the struggle of labor against the plutocracy, Howells not only wrote of that conflict and its antithesis, the Socialism of Altruria, but he descended into the forum to champion the right as he was given to see it—even to protest against the execution of the Chicago anarchists as a 'grotesque perversion of law', knowing full well, as he said, that his action was distasteful to 'the immeasurable majority of the American people'. If his wrath never burned to high heaven and his stories of the times, realistic as they were, marked no epoch in American letters, there was no doubt about the locus of his soul in the curve of the American economic alignment."

The letters which follow, selected from Mildred Howells's "Life in Letters of William Dean Howells", give a fair but fleeting picture of the activities of Howells during the 1880's. The temper of his mind, urbane, keen, essentially cultured, is evident from first to last. He had, by this time, reached a vantage point of years where he might profit by his experience and his knowledge of humanity. He was an able and intelligent epitome of what the New England scene in its full flowering might evolve.

H. S. G.

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The following paragraph is from a letter to William Cooper Howells, W. D.'s father, written from Boston and dated April 27, 1880.