

## THE ARTS AND LETTERS

### THE GERMAN THEATRE

THIS year marks the centenary of Arthur Hugh Clough, and several mildly eulogistic articles have appeared in honor of his name. Reading them, one feels that literary editors have mentioned Clough out of pure politeness. Yet Clough was a personality and a poet. He was an unbeliever in a day when unbelief made one a person of note; but in these days his voice has been lost amid a chorus of negation, and he has lost his individuality and his eminence. The Clough that remains is Clough the artist. Perhaps as finished a poem as he ever wrote (all the British reviews have printed it) is the great sonnet of denial entitled 'Resurrection.'

I dreamed a dream: I dreamt that I  
espied,

Upon a stone that was not rolled aside,  
A Shadow sit upon a grave—a Shade,  
As thin, as unsubstantial, as of old  
Came, the Greek poet told,  
To lick the life-blood in the trench  
Ulysses made —

As pale, as thin, and said:

'I am the Resurrection of the Dead.

The night is past, the morning is at  
hand,

And I must in my proper semblance  
stand,

Appear brief space and vanish — listen,  
this is true,

I am that Jesus whom they slew.'

THE National Portrait Gallery has been re-opened. Many of the rooms are not yet accessible, but the top floor redecorated and rehung is ready for visitors.

The new director has retained the chronological arrangement, starting with the Tudor and Stuart portraits, and finishing with the works of Reynolds and Gainsborough and the other painters of their day.

THE *Times* continues to write interestingly of the theatre in Berlin.

'On a recent occasion, when revolutionary fiends had run amuck in Berlin, and the streets and squares had resounded with bursting grenades and shrieking bullets, I stepped from a *droschke* near the Bismarck monument and saw a little group of Berliners hurrying to the theatre. The men were smoking fat cigars, and the women, their faces powdered and their hair enveloped in fine lace theatre shawls, were tittering in animated conversation. I noticed how a young girl in the party (she was shod in gold dancing slippers, and proletarians were still holding indignation meetings at the street-corners) stepped gingerly over a pool of blood, shuddered, then resumed a *tête-à-tête* talk with her monocled cavalier.

'The gold slippers and the pool of blood are together symbolical of the modern Berlin; and one may be sure that though Cabinets may totter and collapse in quick succession and every sort of party strife rage in the land interminably, the play will proceed till the heavens fall. German fact may be stranger than fiction, but even the Berlin public finds *Hamlet* murders much more realistic — thanks to the trappings, the suits of woe, and the

Reinhardt scenic effects — than an actual affray in Unter den Linden. Last month the impossible happened. It was not only that the government fled to Stuttgart. The theatres closed. Call-boys, scene-shifters, mummies, all joined in the most perfect protest strike ever known. And for a fortnight the gold slippers and the chattering groups of theatre-goers disappeared from the thoroughfares of Berlin.

‘The theatres are now in full swing again. They were hard hit by the *coup d'état*, and are likely to be still more seriously affected by the general state of unsettlement, of which the burden imposed by the new taxation laws is the first and severest outward sign. The general public, struggling enjoyably for seats and fighting good-humoredly for sandwiches in overcrowded foyers and buffets, is as yet hardly aware of the disconsolate outlook. It simply sees that places of amusement are full to overflowing wherever it goes, and that paper money in ever-increasing quantities is fluttering into the hands of laconic cashiers in theatre box-offices. And it may be partly excused for overlooking the seamy side of things, for it cannot be denied that German producers have maintained the illusion by a high standard of performance worthy of a rosier outlook.

‘The most notable production since the reopening of places of entertainment has been that of *Der weisse Heiland* (*The White Redeemer*) at the Grosses Schauspielhaus. Hauptmann’s new dramatic fantasy differs little from the historical story of the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards under Cortez, and the pomp and reverence with which they were received by the Emperor Montezuma and his subjects. His Cortez has, indeed, little of the redeemer about him. Clever,

brutal, believing only in the force of arms and his own generalship, he is a strange blending of the Spanish hidalgo and the Prussian warrant officer — a blending which it seems particularly difficult to avoid in histrionic Germany.

‘Montezuma, as played by Alexander Moissi, is an awe-stricken, long-suffering old monarch, who believes implicitly that the Spanish conquerors, advancing town by town through the land, are the White Gods from over the seas whom the oracles had predicted for centuries; and who finally, disillusioned, a victim to his faith, dies at the hands of his own archers. The whole tragedy is sombre and mysterious. Its scenes are permeated by the spirit of Hauptmann’s best-known fantasies, and they can hardly be said to have made a wide appeal, the success of the production being due in great measure to the rich Mexican settings and the energies of Reinhardt and his players.

‘The Grosses Schauspielhaus, the big circus-theatre in the triumphs and vicissitudes of which such keen interest has been displayed since its inaugural performances of the *Oresteia* in November last, still continues to be the subject of controversy in wide circles in Berlin. With each new production — Romain Rolland’s *Danton* alone excepted — long discussions are raised both by the general public and in the press as to whether the ordinary “peep-show” stage would have been more suitable than the arena, which is admittedly a supreme test of the abilities of the actors if not always of the merits of the play. Just at present one notices more of the vicissitudes than of the triumphs. The latest *première*, that of Walter Hasenclever’s *Antigone*, is a pacifist effort written during the war, in which the playwright attempted to breathe the spirit of 1916 into the old Sophoclean

tragedy. The myth was willing, but the spirit of 1916 was weak, and the play was withdrawn after an outward successful first performance.

'Nothing daunted, Reinhardt has promised his public arena performances of a number of classical dramas, including *Julius Cæsar*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Schiller's *Räuber*, and Goethe's *Egmont*. Meantime, there have been numerous interesting revivals and adaptations in the smaller playhouses. Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Calderon, Ibsen have been represented, as well as German dramatists. *Der lebende Leichnam*, Tolstoy's stage-story of Fédor Protossoff, the ingenuous, self-exiled husband, sinking deeper and deeper in the social scale and vanishing, except for a brief final hour, in the foul atmosphere of subterranean Siberian drinking saloons, could hardly be better performed than it is at the Deutsches Theatre. Fédor, the hopeless idealist, is the part on which Moissi's claim to fame is chiefly based. It may be that that actor's well-known political tendencies predestined him for such a rôle; there is no doubt that he plays it as though inspired.

'In the same playhouse we have recently seen a lively revival of Calderon's *La dama Duenda*, with its marked beauties of Old Madrid, and its cavaliers, ever ready to love, pin their faith in their impudent valets, or die for honor's sake. Hermann Südermann's latest play, which was performed in the provinces during last winter, is now attracting large audiences in the Berlin Residenz Theatre, after having been provided with a more or less happy ending to suit the metropolitan palate. It is a perturbing picture of life on an East Prussian Junker's estate into which a young beauty, quite at home in the *Palais de Danse*, intrudes, and it represents a

crisis in the career of a father, cleverly played by Paul Wegener, who is stronger-willed and more successful than his son in his attempt to pack the girl back to the scene of her former escapades.

'All in all it is a matter for wonder that the Berlin theatrical world presents so animated an aspect and so wide a choice of entertainment. One hears a good deal about deficits, breaches of contract, and despairing managers, while it is said that something like sixty provincial theatres have closed their doors. Both the playhouses and the opera houses have undoubtedly been hard hit by recent disturbances in Germany.'

THE centenary of Herbert Spencer, (born April 27, 1820) has passed almost unnoticed, a fact that should serve as a melancholy warning to all grandiose propounders of apparent certainties. How 'certain' those books of his are — from *Social Statics or the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified to From Negative Beneficence to Positive Beneficence*. All 'Sir Oracle' from beginning to end, and quite devoid of literary beauty. Yet Spencer was a great man in his time, and an age of remarkable men accepted him as its most distinguished thinker. A word from Mr. A. L. Courtney's review of Spencer's work may elucidate the mystery.

'I ask, then, once more, what has happened? Why is Herbert Spencer a "back number" for our present generation? Well, the world has rolled on, more water has passed under the bridges, fresh interests have dawned, new modes of thought, or, at all events, new tendencies, have arisen. M. Bergson has taken the best out of Herbert Spencer, and fashioned out of it no longer a dead mechanical universe, but his conception of the

*Evolution Creatrice.* And then the newest discoveries are dead against Herbert Spencer. Whatever else Dr. Einstein has proved or disproved, at all events he has suggested grave reasons for thinking that our ideas of space and time are strictly relative to ourselves, whereas Spencer, of course, with Evolution as his sheet-anchor for explaining the whole mystery of the universe, must believe implicitly in the reality of time — not as our mode of regarding things, but as an essential quality in things themselves. Be the causes what they may, in this centenary year, with “all his conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk to this little measure,” Herbert Spencer holds his place, no doubt; in the history of thought, but he is dethroned from his position as the great English philosopher of the nineteenth century. That title belongs assuredly to John Stuart Mill, a figure far more pleasant to the eye, not so scientific perhaps as Spencer, but more reasonable, more cultured, more humane.’

MR. FRANK SWINNERTON has been to see *Little Women* and Miss Peggy O’Neil in *Paddy the Next Best Thing*, and finds the performances maddeningly restless. His criticism of restless acting is worth reading. ‘Miss O’Neil was on the go the whole time. It was as though she were on springs. For every word a fresh gesture, a new movement. A leap, a “hurroo,” a kiss, a frown, a totter, an expressive turn away, a pout — the changes are incalculable and incommunicable by written word. The whole effect is one of supreme restlessness.’

‘The same effect was produced on me in *Little Women* — that every piece of business had been worked out to a pattern, and that all this comic rolling

of the eyes, pinching and pouting of the mouth, doubling up of the body, whirlwind dancing, cajolery, and violent physical exertion, was calculated to a hair’s-breadth. It showed enormous pains. But it is the sort of thing which is seen, presumably, to its best effect at a distance. Close at hand it is so restless that it makes one’s eyes ache.

‘A possible explanation of the popularity of this exaggeration of muscular and facial play may perhaps be found in one or both of two things. It may be found in the demand of all neurasthenic and neurotic people for sharp, loud noises, sudden action, rapid movement, and intense variety. It may result from the same nervous exhaustion that created the craze for jazz music, the demand for extraordinarily rapid means of transit, for anything fresh in the way of sensation. It may thus belong to our time, and be an inevitable phase in the world’s progress toward satiety. Or, it may have developed with the development of the film industry.

‘Facial play and muscular energy, without the spoken word, there tell the tale. Few English actors and actresses seem to have the natural physical expressiveness that makes good ‘movies,’ whereas the Americans make marvelous pictures and are among the best picture actors in the world. This would certainly account for the fact that restless acting is chiefly featured by Americans; whereas the Americans certainly have no monopoly of nervous disease. If the latter explanation is the true one, it might be worth while to start a campaign to stop the increasing alliance between the picture theatre and the legitimate stage. Something ought to be done at once. It would be deplorable if acting developed simply into the art of grimace.’

[*The London Mercury*]  
**THE SOLDIER ADDRESSES HIS  
BODY**

BY EDGELL RICKWORD

I shall be mad if you get smashed  
about,

We've had good times together, you  
and I;

Although you grouched a bit when luck  
was out

And women passionless, and we  
went dry.

Yet there are many things we have not  
done;

Countries not seen, where people do  
strange things,

Eat fish alive, and mimic in the sun  
The solemn gestures of their stone-  
gray kings.

I've heard of forests that are dim at  
noon,

Where snakes and creepers wrestle  
all day long;

Where vivid beasts grow pale with the  
full moon,

Gibber and cry, and wail a mad old  
song;

Because at the full moon the hippo-  
griff

With ivory-pointed snout and agate  
feet,

With his green eye will glare them cold  
and stiff

For the coward wyvern to come  
down and eat.

Vodka and kvas, and bitter mountain  
wines

We have not drunk, nor snatched at  
bursting grapes

To pelt slim girls among Sicilian vines  
Who'd flicker through the leaves,  
elusive shapes.

Yes, there are many things we have  
not done,

But it's a sweat to knock them into  
rhyme.

Let's have a drink, and give the cards  
a run  
And leave dull verse to the dull  
peaceful time.

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[*The New Statesman*]

**PURPLE**

BY MARTIN ARMSTRONG

Deep, deep is the night,  
Brooding, cavernous, beautiful, wide.

Woods on the blue hillside  
Show but as blurs in the gloom more  
deeply glooming,

And the long, familiar barn so bland  
in the light,

Is grown phantasmal, a huge shape  
dimly looming,

A yawning wave upreared to over-  
whelm

Us that cower and wonder  
In the heavy shadow under,  
Dwindled to dwarfs in the midnight's  
purple realm.

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[*The New Witness*]

**DIRGE**

(*For any lonely burial*)

BY CHARLES WILLIAMS

Carry him by and lay him down,  
Mourners there be none;  
The priest mutters over the grave,  
That low and lone one.

Poorly lived he and poorly died —  
Care for that is none;  
In a poor house, poor heart and mind,  
A house now undone.

There is none here to weep for him—  
Sorrow hath he none:  
Carry him past and leave him low,  
Now all need is done.