

## LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

### THE STAGE IN TURKEY.

WE have heard not a little latterly about the political and international affairs of Turkey, but nothing or almost nothing about its literature and art. Is it too distressful a country — is it indeed too insecurely a country at all — to have poets and painters? Who are the Thomas Hardys and the Epsteins of Mustapha Kemal's dominions? And is there a theatre in Turkey — at least a Little Theatre?

This last question is answered by a Constantinople correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, who bears testimony to the stirrings of a nascent dramatic art in that city and beyond. What should be of chief interest to English observers is the fact that until within the last two years the main obstacle to the development of a theatrical art in Turkey was the veto on actresses' parts being taken by Turkish women. To appear on the stage, a woman would have had to discard her veil, and only recently has that been socially possible. Yet it seems never to have occurred to the Turks that boys might take women's parts as effectively as they did on the Elizabethan stage in England. If it had, the Turkish drama might have been enriched by a series of rôles, such as those of Rosalind and Viola, created with boy actors in mind.

What actually happened was that a generation or two ago the Turkish-speaking Armenians of Constantinople formed the idea of organizing public theatrical representations in Turkish, since Armenian women were under no such restriction. Unsatisfactory as this

must have been to one-hundred-per-cent Turks, it was the basis for a gradual adjustment of the popular mind to the idea of a national drama, and it was not long before more and more natives took to the art of acting. The last step was taken when, two years ago, a Turkish woman, Mme. Bediar Hanum, appeared before the footlights. This lady is the wife of the director of the Dar-ul-Bedai, a national conservatoire and dramatic company. The occasion for her appearance was a tour of the company to Smyrna, where, owing to the events of the war, Armenians were not allowed. 'The company,' says this correspondent, 'met with no protests, though it went on to Trebizond and Samsun, which are considered to be conservative and backward areas. Everywhere the advantage of naturalness, not only in pronunciation but even in representation, due to having true Turkish actresses, has been recognized and acclaimed, and there will be no going back from it now.'

There are now eight Turkish actresses in the Dar-ul-Bedai, and the innovation may be said to have established itself. What the theatrical life of the country needs chiefly is funds and dramatic authors. It is easy to see why native writers have not hitherto felt particularly drawn to the stage, why Armenian actors — culturally as well as linguistically alien — have not been a great stimulus to potential Turkish playwrights. Until very recently the stock-in-trade of the stage in Constantinople has been adaptations, chiefly from the

modern French drama. The adapting, it is true, is usually very freely done, so that sometimes the original finds itself in an almost unrecognizable form; nevertheless the plays that result are essentially derivative and would never constitute an original dramatic literature. At the best they could but serve as models for genuinely indigenous plays.

'Original dramatic authorship,' says the writer in the *Guardian*, is naturally rare, 'but a number of recent plays have hit the public taste, and there is promise of a school of Turkish drama for the future. There have been tragedies, plays of peasant life, and even historical plays in verse. On the whole it would seem that the Turkish dramatic mentality tends toward tragedy; the adaptations take the lighter line, but most of the original creative work runs at present to serious moralist and even tragic plays.'



#### A SWEDISH PUNDIT

THE fate of the creative writer who uses a little-known and not very widely spoken language is notoriously hard. We hear less of the similar lot of scholars who publish all their works — now that Latin is no longer a learned Esperanto — in such minor tongues. Furthermore, Bulgarian sonneteers, Finnish essayists, and Portuguese playwrights are fairly frequently brought into the limelight of international attention by all kinds of journalistic accidents as well as by such institutions as the Nobel Prize. Such good luck is not likely to be the portion of literary historians, philosophers, or theologians.

How many readers, even students, outside of Scandinavia, for example, know the name of Henrik Schück? Yet M. Schück is easily the most distinguished literary scholar in Sweden, formerly professor at the University of

Upsala, the author of a monumental *History of Literature* from Genesis to the year 1900, and, as permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, the man who wields the greatest influence in Nobel Prize decisions. 'I have just paid a visit to this scholar,' says a writer in *L'Indépendance Belge*, 'and I am still under the spell of his charm — a charm that is based on a great simplicity of manner and a rare intellectual force. Tall, gaunt, his long head brought to a point by a slightly curling beard, M. Schück obviously belongs to that sturdy and thoughtful race that gave Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII to the world. The dreamer and the man of indefatigable energy are both somehow expressed in the smile with which he welcomes his visitor. He seemed to feel a kind of embarrassment in admitting that his curiosity had led him into a study of Oriental literatures, and that, in particular, he had written a huge book on the literature of the Hebrews.'

Sweden, as this writer observes, has had her share of distinguished specialists, but if she could claim only so conspicuous a type of the synthetic scholar as M. Schück she would take high rank in the world of learning.



#### VACHEL LINDSAY

'In spite of some faults in diffuseness, a certain weakness in his more conventional poems,' says the *Observer*, 'Mr. Vachel Lindsay is easily the most important living American poet. He is more than that. He is the voice and hope of that eager, generous young America, the goal of all kinds of frustrated peoples. That America can never be regarded as submerged by Babbitry or mere commercialism so long as Mr. Lindsay sings his songs from New York to New Mexico. His new collected edition has some splendid new things in it, a long preface, and

some fascinating drawings for lovers of Mr. Lindsay's poetry. We in Europe used to welcome the American authors who spoke for Americans and in American — Whitman and Mark Twain. Today we attach too much significance to the cosmopolitan authors of the States — men of great ability, no doubt, and considerable technical achievement, but without that prophetic spirit, that deep, glowing enthusiasm, that mark Mr. Lindsay's best work. There is an internationalism in letters that is altogether good — the internationalism that welcomes into the house of art all the newer and stranger peoples. There is another internationalism which is really only a perverted chauvinism — it demands that literature should everywhere follow the same new lines. It seeks modernity, and only achieves a narrow modishness. It will be a great pity if a public is not found in England for Mr. Lindsay's work, for it will mean that we are losing our capacity to admire and understand those things in art that are genuinely interpretative of national character.'

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#### WESSEX UNIVERSITY

A MOVEMENT has recently been set on foot to transform University College at Southampton into a 'University for Wessex' that would be to the West Country what the great provincial universities of the Midlands and the North have been to those districts. In this case the appeal to the imagination is perhaps greater, for the use of the name Wessex would revive the old unity of those counties that were once the heart of Alfred's kingdom and the seat of the last flourishing culture before the Conquest. It would also be a kind of tribute to Mr. Hardy, and the tribute would be enhanced if the project for founding a Thomas Hardy Chair of English Literature should materialize. A Wil-

liam of Wykeham Chair is also projected. Readers of *Tom Brown's School-days* will remember that William of Wykeham was the founder of Winchester College, whose motto was, 'Manners makyth man.'

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#### THE CENTENARY OF AN ACADEMY

IN 1826 a body known as the Society of Scottish Artists decided to take a new lease of life by becoming a real academy, and was therefore incorporated as the Royal Scottish Academy, and organized on the model of the Royal Academy of London. This year it is celebrating its hundredth birthday; a centenary exhibition, to be held this spring, will be made up of the work of past and present Scottish artists, and will very fully illustrate the progress of Scottish art throughout the century, from the time of Wilkie and Raeburn to the present day.

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#### DOSTOEVSKII FILMED

THE Film Society in London — organized last fall, as our readers will remember, to encourage serious artistic work in the movies — has recently seen a movie version of Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment* produced in Berlin by Robert Wiene, who is widely known as the producer of *Dr. Caligari*. The actors were all of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, and the designs were the work of Professor Andreev. According to the *Times*, the film is 'a beautiful and austere piece of work, to which we can give no higher praise than that it does no dishonor to the book.'

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#### QUEEN ELIZABETH AND MOZART DRAMATIZED

MR. JOHN DRINKWATER distinctly 'started something' when in writing *Abraham Lincoln* he made use of an

historical figure for dramatic purposes. The method was by no means unheard of in the history of the drama, but who will say that it has not taken a new lease of life in the last few years? Mr. Drinkwater's own plays on Cromwell and Lee have been by no means the only successors to *Abraham Lincoln*. And Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* is unique, if at all, only in its excellence and its wide popularity. The two most recent contributions to the genre are a play on Queen Elizabeth, — *Gloriana*, by Gwen John, the daughter of Augustus John, — and *Mozart*, by M. Sacha Guitry, who five or six years ago achieved a great success with his *Pasteur*.

Miss John's play depicts eight scenes from the life of the Virgin Queen, from her early imprisonment in the Tower to the last days of her old age. Though marked by considerable skill in the treatment of character, the play is said to be open to the charge of covering too much ground and producing too scattered an effect. The same charge cannot be brought against M. Guitry, who has taken a single episode in Mozart's life — his early visit in Paris with the Baron von Grimm and his sentimental adventures there — and confined himself strictly to it. According to a writer in the *Morning Post*, the play is in M. Guitry's best vein — 'his finest theatrical achievement.'

#### RICHARD STRAUSS'S NEW OPERA

RICHARD STRAUSS, the Viennese composer, disclosed to a writer for the *Vossische Zeitung* recently his plans for a two-act opera based on Hugo von Hofmannsthal's dramatic poem, *The Egyptian Helen*. This work is a continuation of the Helena episode in Goethe's *Faust*, and Strauss is treating the theme in a (for him) unprecedentedly lyrical vein. It is uncertain where the first

production of the new work, which cannot be expected before the end of 1926, will take place: besides Dresden, Munich, and Stuttgart, Vienna and Berlin are mentioned by the interviewer.

Herr Strauss also expressed himself piquantly on the subject of modern music. 'For twenty years,' he said, 'I have been working at the problem of combining tones and chords that seem discordant in such a way that they will give the effect of harmony. The young men now are doing the same thing without bothering about harmonization. Later on we shall see — and hear — which of us is right.'



#### 'PYGMALION' WITH A DIFFERENCE

WHAT would *Pygmalion* be without the shock of hearing Eliza use that atrocious word — atrocious at least to British ears — in the third act? Shaw's famous comedy on phonetics has recently been played at the Raimund-theater in Vienna, but we are not told what Viennese substitute for the oath was found. A writer in the *Observer* does record, however, that Eliza is made to speak German like a low-class Czech woman, and he very properly challenges the fitness of this device, especially when Eliza's father — that incomparable scamp with his diatribe on 'middle-clawss morality' — is made to speak ordinary Low German. Whatever else may have been wrong with the speech of Eliza and old Doolittle, it was at least consistently wrong!

'Another strange feature,' continues this correspondent, 'is to be seen in the first act — little toy tramcars continuously passing St. Paul's Cathedral in the rain. Local inaccuracies may be tolerable when prescribed by the author, but in this case those little toy cars, intended to represent something like the London traffic on a wet night, are about as absurd as could be.'

## THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

**Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles**, by Thomas Hardy. London and New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.25.

At the venerable age of eighty-five, Mr. Thomas Hardy, the most illustrious living English author, continues to write and publish poems with the best of his juniors. His new volume of lyric and narrative verse has been the event of the season in poetry, and the object of the most respectful criticism. Sir Edmund Gosse, himself the dean of English criticism, — though some years younger than Mr. Hardy! — devotes a long review to the book in the *Sunday Times*: —

A brooding and dejected temperament, left during extreme old age in possession of a cerebral acuity rarely equaled, and perhaps never surpassed, a shrewdness and tenacity of thought wholly divorced from any inclination to activity — these are the qualities which seem to be revealed in the very remarkable, but very difficult and disquieting, poetry of our most eminent living writer. Every attempt to measure him by accepted standards is a failure; he even fails so to measure himself. He lays a trap for the unwary almost at the beginning of this new book: —

Any little old song  
Will do for me,  
Tell it of joys gone long  
Or joys to be,  
Or friendly faces best  
Loved to see.

Newest themes I want not  
On subtle strings,  
And for thrillings pant not  
That new song brings:  
I only need the homeliest  
Of heart-stirrings.

But his poems, though dealing with the most unassuming incidents, are never

'homely.' The poetry of Mrs. Hemans was homely; Ella Wheeler Wilcox roused a million heart-stirrings on her pinchbeck lyre; when I was young, Eliza Cook, rejecting 'subtle strings,' announced that she could not 'Sing the Old Songs' — I forget why, perhaps because they were out of print. All these emotional and popular bards were 'homely' to excess. But Mr. Hardy, heaven save us, is not homely! He is a great tragic artist, only saved from savagery by his unearthly calm, his determination in the face of eternal woe neither to strive nor to cry.

One difficulty of offering any kind of definition of Mr. Hardy's very peculiar genius is the fact that he has refused the title of 'pessimist' several times, and with an acerbity foreign to his nature. It is quite true that this word, like so many in our buffeted and flurried language, is loosely used, and made to cover persons who are totally unlike Mr. Hardy. Among them are those who, ten years ago, were sure that we should lose the war, and who seemed almost to hope that we should; those who, while preserving a high regard for themselves, think meanly of everybody else; those who believe that the stigmata on their 'lone dark souls' make them socially interesting. Of course, if the word brings up recollection of such types as these, it is no wonder that Mr. Hardy repudiates it. But we seem left unable to define the nature of this 'infinite passion, and the pain of finite hearts that yearn.'

The dominating note of Mr. Hardy's poetry, especially in its latest manifestations, has been its refusal of all hope, the lack of all faith in the accomplishment of promises human or divine. This is a different thing from the misery of Leopardi, with which it has sometimes been compared, because the dreary anguish of the Italian poet is obviously in great measure a consequence of his lifelong