

civilization of ours, so intricate, so specialized, has set them a single task: that of healing broken men, of keeping living souls in dead bodies. There are other specialists to take charge of the killing.

To die for one's country! . . . If one were only sure of dying.

DEEMS TAYLOR.

Paris.

Verhaeren

THE work of Emile Verhaeren was a long progress toward joy. The world has known geniuses who did not have to make the ascent. Born at the summit, their art has been a mighty, a continual, affirmation of existence. They are, however, the exceptions. There has been but one Rubens, one Händel, one Rabelais. The rest have had to toil towards gladness. Many have died on the cruel journey. The Belgian poet who perished a few weeks ago in a railroad accident, persevered and attained. The mature, the definitive portion of his work, is a passionate hymn to life. He is of the company of the conquerors.

The day into which Verhaeren was born imposed the struggle categorically upon him. It was an uncharted world that confronted him. His native Flanders, perhaps even more than the rest of the globe, had undergone, during the first half of the nineteenth century, a change almost necromantic. A somnolent agricultural country had, of a sudden, become a furnace. Vast manufacturing cities were sucking up the rural populations. Nature had taken shapes of brick and glass and steel. The power of mechanical devices, the obliteration of distance, the knitting of the continents, had given the earth new proportions. Man was rent in the transformation. Before him lay an altered world, demanding that he cast aside the scheme of things he had fashioned for himself, relinquish his modes of apprehension. So only could he get joy and satisfaction. It offered its novel forms and rhythms, its novel colors and designs to the artist, but at a great price. He must not alone give over the old man. He must be reborn in harmony with the new order, affirm it, venture forth with it on the voyage into the unknown, hold to it for good or ill. The new day wanted a lover. To no other could it make surrender of itself. That was its challenge.

It was made not only to Verhaeren. It was made to every artist in every land. Few took up the gauntlet, with the exception of Whitman scarcely a poet. Parnassians, pre-Raphaelites, symbolists, they were the poets of the dead past, singers who had retreated into themselves, drawn by homesickness for a departed world. And, for a

while, Verhaeren went their way. He fled from life. The world of his earliest poems is not the living Flanders. It is a dreamland woven from the Flemish art of a day long gone. The Flanders of those cold, formal poems is the land of Rubens, of Brueghel, of the lusty painters of the kirmesses, the shadowy Flanders of the medieval cloisters, dead Bruges, not living Brussels. It was as if Verhaeren, with a gesture of dread, had sought to brush away all consciousness of the new and sink back into the reveries of the old. The gesture was ineffectual. There was stuff in Verhaeren that would not remain sunken. The old Flemish lust of life was fermenting in him. It would out toward reality. Reality had become imperative for such a temperament. Either Verhaeren had to fight his way up out of his introversion to the level of the truth, or perish in the combat of tendencies. Dreams of the past could not suffice him. And so Verhaeren, emerging from the mood of "Les Flamandes" and "Les moines," found himself midst the conflict he had sought to escape.

The poems that indicate his terrible struggle for adjustment have attracted an undue amount of morbid curiosity. Stefan Zweig, Verhaeren's German translator and apologist, for instance, devotes a chapter of his brilliant, if effusive and exclamatory study solely to an analysis of the mental states revealed in the poems, and concludes that Verhaeren was insane for a period. One need scarcely accept his implication. There is no doubt, however, that the man was soul-sick to the point of suicide, that life had resolved itself for him into a slow crucifixion. The energy continually germinating within him, pent up and undirected, took a malicious revenge, and turned laceratingly upon him. If Verhaeren finally emerged from the conflict, "from under the hood of self," it was because his emotions had forced a channel for themselves. Those who knew him say that all his life his face showed signs of the suffering he had undergone in this new birth. But his spirit overcame. It had discovered faith and its dynamic. Verhaeren knew

que Pan et que Jésus, tous deux, étaient des morts.

But life was there, and the future. And in his heart there sang the hope that

quelque jour, du fond des brouillards et des voiles,
Surgit un nouveau Christ, en lumière sculpté,
Qui soulève vers lui l'humanité
Et la baptise au feu de nouvelles étoiles,

and that had set him free. The titanic mêlée, the bold and powerful rhythms, the vigorous spiritual design of the modern world came to him. His imagination was fired, his talent galvanized to re-

creation of what he saw. The world had gained a bardic genius.

We know little of Verhaeren's private life. But we do know that his wedlock was a sovereignly happy one. So much his love-poems, "*Les heures claires*," "*Les heures d'après-midi*," tell us. They are the expression of a union silent and steadfast for very passion, of an intimacy in which a whisper, a glance, a half-realized gesture, is language enough. In the mighty stream of his verse, they are like a little bird-haunted island, tranquil in the sunshine. It is useless to speculate to what extent Verhaeren's work was influenced by his marriage. Enough that that work progressed towards its high goal, that Verhaeren took the world to himself, and perceived beauty and order wherever he gazed. Just as the parnassian of "*Les Flamandes*" had passed into the sinister, the agonizing Verhaeren of "*Les débâcles*," so the poet of the hallucinated countryside, the tentacled cities, merged into a greater. The man who had fled from life, who had been wrecked by it, came to hymn it, to chant, as in "*Le Paradis*," the happiness of a humanity that, finding the doors of Eden open once more, refuses to forego the earth. Criticism has scarcely been just to this final period of Verhaeren art, has concerned itself overmuch with the stages of the development. In those last and greatest of his volumes, "*Les forces tumultueuses*," "*La multiple splendeur*," "*Les rythmes souveraines*," as once before in the art of a Rubens, Flanders has made a great affirmation of life. In them, there is the joyous yea-saying of the hearty, sensuous Fleming, quick again as in the great century, hungry for experience, for labor, for beauty, inflamed by the pageantry of the earthly paradise. They are afloat with the wonder of modern things. The strutting life of the new world is there, the shipping, the factories, the gold, the railroads, the cities, the industrial proletariat, the war of the sexes, the dominating figures of captain and banker and statesman, the new ideas and new sciences and discoveries, the new dreams and fervors and religions. They are set in rhythms that jostle and hurtle in their eagerness to flow, in words (Parisians disclaim it as French) rude, biting, aflame with energy. The poems act on the reader like physical stimuli. They are so much nervous fluid shut in the forms of verse. Intoxication wells in them. It was Verhaeren's purpose. He was deliberately the poet of enthusiasm. He knew only too well that

Le temps n'est qu'un mensonge: il fuit;
Seule existe celui qui crée
Emprisonnant l'ample durée
Dans l'heure ou son génie écrit.

And so he set out to fire men with his dionysiac

verse. He wished to impregnate them with the creative impulse so ardent within itself, to excite their imaginations with the spectacle of modern life, that they might be led to express themselves. To what extent he was successful with the silent men who act and give no explanations of their actions, we shall never know, never learn whether the Belgian resistance to Germany drew inspirations from his songs. But in the literary world his influence is markedly at work. It has already set other creative genius free. Both Jules Romains and Johannes V. Jensen make Verhaeren their point of departure. It is very likely that he will bring about a new movement in European poetry, will dominate as no lyricist since Verlaine has done. For his art is pre-eminently sanguine, masculine, dynamic. Of all twentieth century poetry, his approximates most closely to the measurements of a great liberating art, a work that most permanently inflames and invigorates life.

The war, the rape of Belgium, made Verhaeren famous through all the world. But it put to grievous trial a faith attained only after a lifetime of aspiration. The man who had hymned the new Europe, its godlike energy, came to see Europe reverting with redoubled zest to the old barbarism, its energy transformed into a paroxysm of destruction. He saw the Germany that had admired and acclaimed him, had termed him a German poet who by chance wrote in French, overrun his beloved Belgium, saw those who pretended understanding him pervert his ideas hideously. How deeply the man who had been signalled the conscience of Belgium was made to suffer by the war, we can but guess. "*Belgium's Agony*" intimates something of his rage and his sorrow. Militaristic Germany, the oppressor of life, must have oppressed him, in the comparative security of his English asylum, as she did few other men. And yet, in the little work, perhaps his last, "*Parmi les cendres*," the old faith gleams again. He knows that Belgium, as after the Burgundian, the Spanish, the Austrian devastations, will re-arise; that Europe is being born afresh out of death and destruction, and that for all her past misery, she will take up the march of civilization with grander vision. And so Verhaeren waited. A railroad accident cut short his brave vigil. He should have lived to see the war end, to see Belgium restored, to see the energy of the world clarified, constructive once more. He would have been the first to greet the new day. Had he not said

Partons quand même, avec notre âme inassouvie,
Puisque la force et que la vie
Sont au delà des vérités et des erreurs?

And he would have sung a song of hope, not alone for Belgium. He would have sung for all the

world. For it was in all the world that he had faith, and it was to all the world that his word had ever gone.

PAUL ROSENFELD.

Emerald Lake

I DO not know whether, as a manner of living, Emerald Lake is worse than those Calabrian villages from which so many of its inhabitants come, but as an architectural litter it is almost as desperate as anything our landscape offers. Once the bed of a broad shallow lake, the region is as low as land can be, and its fields are almost perpetually damp. Streets have been cut in long straight lines and left to wallow in their mud. A gaudy sign-board announces the shifty "real-estate development company" which is responsible for the little foreign settlement. Looking down these vapid streets, one sees a broken line of square, flat-roofed houses of brick and stone, like a caricature of the squat earthquake buildings of Caserta, with here and there a balcony and a touch of color. But in spite of the sprawling space all about, these houses bulge with dark people. A little squalid shop usually darkens the ground floor, and from the apartments above float streamers of bright-colored clothes. Already these streets suggest the time when the combined genius of the land speculator and the Italian padrone will have built Emerald Lake solidly up to the great city which it brushes.

But now the little settlement overflows its streets. The scene is dotted with tiny homesteads, dilapidated shacks of weather-beaten boards thrown together out of old lumber and tar-paper, with a window or two and a stove-pipe chimney. Each little hut is set in its patch of garden and surrounded by its stockade of palings, a brave gesture of an ownership that looks so pitifully clinging and uncertain. On the gaunt and rocky places is tethered the ubiquitous goat against whose marauding these proprietors waste their precious lumber. Black-haired babies and bristly dogs roll in the gutter and on the sidewalks where some bold entrepreneur has already laid his line of "concrete." There are few trees, and the settlement lies in a hot September glare that seems only too grateful to the swarthy, heavy, incorrigibly healthy women who drag themselves to the corner grocery or stand fiercely talking at the doorways. They are all smoothly black-haired, and they all look middle-aged and they all look alike. But for all their clumsiness there is a certain piratical vigor and intensity about them. In my childhood, whenever I rode through Emerald Lake in the car, this

was what was most the very essence of "foreign" to me. And as I heard tales of these Italian neighbors going in so whole-heartedly for the anger or lasciviousness or murder which life elementally seemed to demand of them, I wondered at our complacent way of fearing them and of pitying their weak servitude to emotion. These Italians always looked very determined to me, and, illiterate and primitive as I knew them to be, they insisted, against the gray background of our town life, upon seeming important as people. Even the babies have a certain intensity and determination as they totter on the sidewalks, giving evidence that these broad women are not middle-aged but the authentic mothers of them and in the full tide of their prolific career. The young girls you do not see until six o'clock calls them pouring out of the mills, running and chattering in a confused babble. The fact that the eternal-looking mothers were once such ungainly, flimsy, indefinite young animals is no more mysterious perhaps than the fact that the cheerfully guttural men who are repairing the electric road were once like those definite little babies who are bruising themselves on the pavement. For such integrated and elemental people youth cannot be a protective period of prolonged infancy. It is rather something quick, unpleasant, irrelevant, to explode quickly into the real business of working and fighting and breeding. Such people do not fool and fritter away their passions, but get them somehow conserved for life. Emerald Lake represents the injection of sudden vitality into our Puritan town.

The question of what we are going to do with this vitality is so important that it vaguely stirs our community conscience. And they with us! What will America do to these babies in their growing up? Will they lose something of that intensity and become like the painfully collared Domenicoes who stand around the saloon of an evening? If they surrender ditch-digging to some even more needy race, will there be provided for them or will they create for themselves work that will keep all that elemental vigor? Will the girls stay soft and foolish and fail to jump suddenly into eternal-looking mothers? Will they make us gayer, intenser, more primitive, or will our streets merely sophisticate and corrode their vigor? If they become more like us, what obscure things will happen to their souls, and if they do not, what things will happen to ours?

Our town shows its sense of the significance of all these matters by sending Emerald Lake a school, a raw red brick hulk with hideous green shades and a proud and strutting flag-pole. Indeed with characteristic American other-worldliness the school has preceded the sewer. The school is the