

Books of Special Interest

Caxton's Ovid

OVIDE HYS BOOKE OF METHAMORPHOSE. Books X-XV. Translated by WILLIAM CAXTON. Newly printed from the Manuscript in the Pepysian Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1924.

Reviewed by E. K. RAND
Harvard University

AMONG the treasures of the library of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is a volume once owned by Pepys, who bound it in brown sheep-skin, his standard binding, and stamped the cover with his arms. Before him, the book had passed through noble and perhaps royal hands. The earliest owner was probably William Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, who may well have received it from the author himself. The book contains in manuscript the latter half of Caxton's translation of the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid, a work which the great printer finished in 1480, but, it would seem, did not put through his press. Our manuscript may have been his copy, and a copy made by his own hand. In any case, it is the only existing copy of Caxton's work. It was published in 1819 by George Hibbert in an edition of forty-four copies. It now appears in a much more satisfactory form, sumptuously printed on Kelmscott hand-made paper and accompanied by explanatory prefaces. Mr. Stephen Gaselee recounts the history of the volume and explains the principles on which he has edited the text, while his Oxford associate, Mr. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, discusses the literary interest of Caxton's work. The edition is limited to three hundred and seventy-five copies; it should command the attention of book-lovers in search of the beautiful, the rare, and the entertaining.

Mr. Gaselee has attempted, he states, as faithful a reprint as modern typography allows. He indicates the rubrication by the use of italics, retains the original spellings and makes only a few changes in punctuation. As the looks of age is thus very foreign to a modern, there seems no good reason for con-

sulting his convenience by the substitution of *j* for *i* and *v* for *u*. The editor has likewise expanded contractions, briefly explaining his practice and referring the reader to the facsimiles given by Hibbert and by Gordon Duff in his book on Caxton published in 1905. But surely the present volume should have been accompanied by at least one photographic facsimile. The unique importance of the text demands the utmost exactness in its reproduction; the editor has not quite lived up to his aim. The reader who can glide without jolt over *threstyd* ("thrust") and *emonge* ("among") and *persyd* ("pierced")—to take random examples from a single page—would not have balked at *ioye* or *ialousye* or *destruccion* in its abbreviated form. If a special font of contractions could not be devised, their presence could readily be indicated by enclosing the omitted letters in parentheses. Such a facsimile, or better yet a photographic reproduction like those in the Leyden or the Vatican series, would make Pepys's manuscript in *propria persona* accessible in many libraries, and prompt, perhaps, the printing of a somewhat more modernized text in less expensive form. For the moment, we are grateful for a beautiful book.

Caxton's work deserves a wide reading. It is much more than a translation of Ovid. It is a pity that only the half is preserved, and that the half lost is the first half, which doubtless contained the author's preface to his work. He drew from Ovid not directly but from a French rendering printed in the house of Colard Mansion in 1484. Caxton was associated with him at Bruges, and may have made his own translation from the manuscript that Mansion used. This French form contained the moralization of Thomas Walley woven into the text. Bits of the history of Troy were likewise interpolated from Benoit de Ste. More, Guido della Colonna, and other sources. There are even traces of interlinear glosses that have worked their way into the text. The effect on a modern reader is as if pages and foot-notes had been melted into one. There is a purpose in this medley, which, while spoiling Ovid's subtleties, transforms his poem into

a medieval romance, a riot of marvels and adventures. The author used by Mansion is responsible for most of the inventions, but Caxton, imbued with the spirit of Sir Thomas Malory, adds his bit, as when he makes the instrument on which Pan vainly performed in contest with Apollo a "hornepype of Cornewalle." All this is admirably set forth by Mr. Brett-Smith, who falls into one curious error, however, in stating that Caxton's Helen is not Ovid's. He adds that we must not dismiss her with mere contempt, seeing that "she is a natural result of the feudal system and the age of the Crusades and Courts of Love." So she is. Caxton and his French author see her through the light of the "Romance of the Rose." But she can be found in Ovid. The passage that prompts Mr. Brett-Smith's remark, the description of Helen's covert laughter at Menelaus—comes straight from the "Heroides." The French author has translated, and not too freely translated, the letter of Paris to Helen and Helen's reply. Ovid, himself a mighty romancer and the original deviser of the Knightly Code of Love, has cast his bread on medieval waters, and it has returned to him after many days. Caxton's translations and his French original should be ranged with poems like the "Enëas" and the "Roman de Troie," whose writers found Ovid helpful in turning ancient matter into romance. A thorough analysis of the enlargement of the "Metamorphoses" followed by Mansion should bring into sharper relief the author's plan and art and add an entertaining chapter to the history of Ovid in the Middle Ages.

Of no less interest than Caxton's matter is his style. He sought, like the authors of the "Pleiade" a bit later in France, an illustration or beautifying of the English tongue. As they turned to the diction of the ancients, so he found a model in French. The present work is full of his innovations, for some of which he conveniently gives the contemporary equivalents, as "*herbes verdoysent* or *wexyng grene*," "*orguyllous & proud*," "*soufflemens* and *blowyng*." His aim is to reform "*the olde and aunycient englysshe*" in a modern style. To us, his daring creations, as is sometimes the fate with the ultra-modern, sound quaint. From his misreading of his French original, or from the mistakes already therein, come certain ghost-words, particularly in the case of proper names. "*Crevy and Cao*" are a wondrous pair, whom the reader may not recognize, without the Latin text, as Erebus and Chaos. Such blemishes only enhance the atmosphere of uncontrollable romance, and interfere not at all with the stately charm of Caxton's style. Mr. Brett-Smith describes it well. The following passage, in which I have modernized the punctuation, will show its quality. It contains part of Ovid's picture of the Cave of Sleep, painted again in the artist's own colors.

The hows of this gode was in the most still place of the worlde in the bottom of a kreyves of a mountayne, where as the sonne never shyneth, where as it semeth alway is betwene day and night. There slepeth this god; ther is neyther noyse ne lyghte that may dystrowble hys reste. There resoweneth nothyng but a swete wynd amonge rosysers. And a lytil broke of water souldeth (soudeth?), whych renneth and murmureth upon the gravell that it resoweneth forto gyve appetyte to slepe. . . . Theder came Yrys for to doo the message that Juno had commanded her, defending her self with her handes. For the sleepes wente for to surpysse her, and cam about her. The beaulte of the messenger and the resplendysshynge of her robe caste withyn the place grete clerenes. Whan the slepyng gode sawe her, a lytil he awoke, but yet anon he slomerid agayn and closed and shyte his eyen, and by force of sleep bowed and clynd hys heede and clynynge laye down agayn and slepte.

A String of Beads

SHIP ALLEY. By C. FOX SMITH.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1925. \$2.

MISS Fox Smith's latest book is particularly anecdotal. It is really a bead necklace strung on the thread of a similar subject where her beads are her fragmentary yarns. "Sailor's Inns," "Curios," "The Sea Cook," "Some Old House Flags" are names taken at random from the chapter titles. They should give some idea of what the book is like.

What value it has lies entirely in its manner which is brisk and swift-moving. The matter it contains is quite ancient. The fact that Limehouse is near to shipping and that the "Ariel" won a famous race among tea-clippers has been told over and over again, while the person who does not know that "chanties" are pronounced "shanties" is not likely to pick up the book. But that is the advantage of sailing ships as of Greek or Latin. Only those whose subject is radio or American are obliged to keep up to date.

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A Letter from Italy

By ALDO SORANI

THOMAS MANN, the great German novelist, renewing his pilgrimages to Italy and consenting with Professor von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf to address an Italian and cosmopolitan public in the German cultural Week of the Florence International Book Fair, has marked the official resumption by Germany of her place in Italian culture. A notable step.

The lecturer had chosen for his theme Tolstoy and Goethe, and to draw a parallel between two such opposites seemed an arduous, well-nigh impossible undertaking. Thomas Mann nevertheless brought the subtlest analysis to bear upon his task, and, assisted by his mastery of literary values, diligent technique, and eloquent gesture, he brought Tolstoy and Goethe together so as to reveal unsuspected resemblances between them. Both traced a common ancestry in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at all events in their pleasure in self-expression and the moralist's attitude, and it fell to Thomas Mann's rare sleight of hand to formulate with and around those three names the outline of a literary Society of Nations, supporting his plea with all the arguments and intellectual testimony worthy of the pen that has given us "Der Zauberberg."

It was my good fortune, a few days later, to meet this guest of honor of Florence at the country home of his host, Dr. Richter, and mindful of that intellectual League of Nations whose strands Mann had woven round those mighty names, opportunity served me, I thought, to lay the lines of our talk upon what intellectual Germany today appears to think about the European brotherhood.

Germany, he observed, has not emerged from the war only to withdraw herself within a strained nationalism. Her problems are shared by all literary peoples. The need of a renewed approach is generally felt. Germany wants to count among the Nations. We have agreed to drop politics out of our talk, yet I may as well say—continued Mann—that any concern I may have felt at Marshal Hindenburg's election to the Presidency of the German Reich is due less to personal prejudice against a man for whom I harbor no hostile feelings, than to its possibilities in retarding the advent of that Europeanism towards which our intellectual outlook tends. Hindenburg fortunately has taken the oath to the Republic, and I am not only a believer in her, but also in the solidarity and strength of the forces of democracy which have joined issue with other principles, and won. Moreover Germany, up against Europe and the world at large, Germany turned back upon herself, is as remote from our wish as it is unthinkable. That of which we feel the want is a general return, political, intellectual, and artistic, not indeed to the past, but to the institution, after such far-reaching anarchy, of a new order. In this new order alone the solution lies of problems, ideal as well as practical, not necessarily in reaction but in a sense a revolutionary new order. . . . Nevertheless, he added, I am not a doer, my province is the thinker's, the thought and its vehicle, style. "Der Zauberberg," my last novel, envisages the enchantment of dissolution and draws its theme from all sources, politics and letters, medicine and metaphysics.

That pronouncement led our conversation to the novelist's art. Evolution is noticeable not alone in Mann, but in the younger men of France and Britain. Among the latter, and Aldous Huxley is a typical instance, characters do not act, they question, discuss, and lecture about life. The novel of today turns away from the narrative and constructive theme; a thesis heads each chapter, made up of at least two dissertations. Nothing happens beyond the contrast of views, the author apparently playing audience to his characters after introducing them to us. Mann has not read Huxley; Galsworthy holds his suffrage, it appears, and he recalls his own surname "the German Galsworthy," given him after the publication and English translation of "Buddenbrooks."

There is a "fiction crisis," admits Mann. Everything, today, is traversing a critical stage and the novel seeks a new form, even as life moves in quest of renewed ideals. No doubt this can not be put down to failure in numbers or output. The cause lies elsewhere. The framework of old enfolding plots is shattered, the perspective is reversed. But we have in Germany a number of powerful novelists still. There are Jacob Wassermann, for instance, Thibaut, Heinrich Mann too, my brother, whose ruthless dissection of pre-war Ger-

many reads as the writing upon the wall.

To my query whither literary young Germany trends, Thomas Mann replied as follows:

As far as I can see, expressionism, anti-realistic, spiritualistic, parallel with the like movements in painting and sculpture, has come full cycle, and is past. No marked individuality has been thrown up by, no leader has headed expressionism. The movement, nevertheless, will have proved a useful experience, and it may leave behind an instructive wake, even though accomplishment be lacking. In my opinion, a revived classicism is at hand, outstripping the antique, the traditional canon broken and derided on all sides, and having learned a lesson from expressionism's adventures, trauancies, and vagaries. For my own part, concluded Mann, I am looking for a new form and style, that in its severity, concision, and accuracy shall indeed embody a new realization of life.

The varied influences upon literature came under review and with them inevitably that of Freudian psychology. Thomas Mann believes in the far-reaching influence of Freudian suggestion which is far, he thinks, from waning, as indeed is shown by the issue of that author's collected works in ten volumes.

My novel "Death in Venice," he went on, is underlain by Freudian influence. I should not but for him have treated the subject, so peculiarly sensual and morbid, in this way or, at any rate, seen thus my hero, the renowned writer von Aschenbach's tragic undoing. Whatever may be said, Freud's theory seems an undoubted step towards knowledge of the subconsciousness. In military parlance, I should call Freudism a general assault to conquer the subconscious field. As an artist, however, I admit perplexity, nay, humiliation, the theory acting in the manner of X-rays, disclosing all, even the recondite mystery of action. I revere knowledge, even that which knocks at the entrance beneath the threshold of consciousness, but too much knowledge hurts, inhibiting, nay, abolishing action. Freud knows too much, he learns too much about us, he cuts at the roots of all motive, he raises the veil upon the virgin mind. Excess of knowledge is today our misfortune, an excess starving action for plethoric thought. Hence we not only fail to initiate a definite course along the beaten track, but we fail even to obtain a clear and immediate world outlook, and an instinctive perception of life's significance. Hence our hesitations, our anxieties, our diffidence before the most contradictory systems of thought, and our extreme difficulty to realize. The urgent task before us is to find the new way, namely to march towards the synthesis of knowledge and action. We must remake our youth and virginity. We must overcome knowledge and recreate intuition. We have traversed the phase of naïveté passing on to that of science-worship; the third phase is the union of both, which shall bring forth the miracle of innocence after and through awareness. At this turning, if we reach it, we shall view a new scheme of life for mankind. . . .

Thomas Mann remains the ingenious artificer of the "Death in Venice" and the "Buddenbrooks" and retains all his youthful vigor in despite of all vicissitudes. He is now at work upon another book with a hero different *in toto* from von Aschenbach or from the hero of "Zauberberg," who having betaken himself for a week to Davos, stayed there seven years. The new novel tells the story of a modern captain of industry, an adventurer of exalted rank, with as many possibilities as his scruples are few.

Mann is now on his way to the Lido, allured by the spell of Venice. Will the great novelist dwell there seven days . . . or seven years?

Knut Rasmussen is one of the two or three Arctic explorers who are thoroughly familiar with the Eskimo language and who have made a serious study of Eskimo folk-lore. His latest contribution to the field of his researches is his publication of the second volume of "Myter og Sagn fra Gronland" (Copenhagen: Gyldendal), a collection of stories, arranged in groups, derived from the West Greenland district of Godthaab. Two further volumes in the series are to be published in Danish.

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