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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.

The *Mercur de France* is running some hitherto unpublished papers by Michelet which bear upon the war of 1870.

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Points of View

From London

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I could not stop here without sending a greeting to you. Everything is as beautiful as ever it was and the flowers are even more beautiful than they have any business to be this side of Heaven. The Eros statue is now on the edge of the Thames: You go to the Westminster Bridge and turn to the left and the first thing you know you may have an invisible arrow in your imagination which is the place this fellow aims at. But no one is troubled over Eros any more: Epstein has kept everyone worrying for weeks and weeks: his bird sanctuary memorial to Hudson in Hyde Park draws crowds that seethe with rage and say there ought to be a law. One outraged citizen stood in front of it and talked twelve consecutive hours: variations on the theme TAKE IT OUT. I can't see why: it is a South American version of the Harpy Tomb, it seems to me, and Rima was a South American, wasn't she?

Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes just wrote to ask me if I would meet a group of writers at Rumpelmayer's for tea next week: their names are most imposing. There was a Court last night and Ebury Street, where I live, was rolling with carriages, so I went around to Buckingham Palace and saw a half a dozen duchesses in red coaches with frog-footmen like Cinderella, and any number of lovely debutantes with white feathers. One of these lives next to me and very considerably stood on the curb Thursday night before she stepped into the carriage, long enough to see the gorgeous effect. I am to take tea with A. A. Milne next Friday, to meet Christopher Robin, who is going to autograph my copy of "When We Were Very Young." Oxford is so lovely I do not want to go back to London or anywhere but to live on Holywell Street for ever and ever.

MAY LAMBERTON BECKER.
London.

Subtle Wilde Item

Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

In October, 1922, Messrs. Methuen of London published, in a volume uniform with the first collected edition of the works of Oscar Wilde issued by the same firm in 1908, the scenario of a play called "For Love of the King," which is described on the title-page as "A Burmese Masque." It was widely reviewed in England.

In an Introductory Note prefixed to the volume it is stated that the work was written for Mrs. Chan Toon (now Mrs. Wodehouse-Pearse) and that Wilde sent it to her in Burma accompanied by a letter dated November 27, 1894. "For Love of the King" was first published in *Hutchinson's Magazine*, London, in October, 1921: it appeared also in the *New York Century* in December of the same year.

No manuscript of this work in Wilde's handwriting is known to exist. It was printed from the typewritten copy, "bearing dear Oscar's corrections," which Mrs. Wodehouse-Pearse assures me she received from Wilde at the end of 1894. Through the courtesy of Messrs. Methuen, in whose possession this document is, I have been allowed to examine it. I have no hesitation in saying that the manuscript corrections are not in Wilde's autograph. I am prepared to state elsewhere, if required, in whose handwriting I believe these corrections to be.

Wilde was in the habit of preserving every scrap of his own writing. I have myself examined hundreds of manuscripts of his plays, stories, essays, and poems, both complete and incomplete, some written as early as his undergraduate days and some written during the last few years of his life. No single line of this "Burmese Masque" is known to exist in Wilde's manuscript nor, so far as I know, has any person seen the original of the letter dated November 27, 1894, which Wilde is stated to have written to Mrs. Chan Toon (as she then was). Wilde very seldom dated a letter.

Towards the end of 1894 Wilde was writing "The Importance of Being Earnest" and possibly had not finished "An Ideal Husband." An examination of the original manuscripts of these two plays in the British Museum will show Wilde's method of composition. It is almost incredible that at that period when Wilde was at the height of his dramatic career, when John Hare and other managers were

pressing him to fulfil contracts for which he had already received payment, when (as he complains in the unpublished portion of "De Profundis") circumstances prevented him even from finishing his one-act play called "A Florentine Tragedy," he should have had the time or the inclination to compose and to complete and to revise this "Burmese Masque," differing entirely in subject-matter and in style from any work that he had previously attempted.

Further, it is stated in the Introductory Note that "the late Robert Ross much wanted to include it in an edition of Wilde's works . . . but he could not obtain the owner's consent." From 1905 to 1909 I was closely associated with the late Robert Ross in the preparation and editing of two collected editions of Wilde's works published by Messrs. Methuen which Robert Ross was anxious to make as complete as possible—even fragments of Wilde's American lectures and two unfinished plays were included. If the existence of "For Love of the King" had been known to Mr. Ross it is (to say the least) unlikely that he would not have mentioned it to me.

It is always difficult to prove a negative, but I suggest that until evidence of its authenticity be forthcoming, it should not be taken for granted that "For Love of the King" is the work of Oscar Wilde merely because it has been published under his name more than twenty years after his death.

STUART MASON.
London, England.

In his "La Vie en France au Moyen Age, de la Fin du XIIe au Milieu du XIVe Siecle, d'après les Moralistes du Temps" (Paris: Hachette) Charles V. Langlois presents what is virtually a series of twelve lectures digesting some of the most interesting of the works of twelve moralists from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. His book is a realistic portrayal of mediæval life, with biographical and critical material elucidating its narrative.

The third volume of "La Règne d'Alexandre Ier," by K. Waliszewski (Paris: Plon Nourrit), which has recently appeared, deals with the Congresses from Aix-la-Chapelle to Vienna, but its outstanding interest lies in the picture it presents of Russia during the reign of Alexander and in its analysis of the part that the Czar played in bringing about the demoralization of the country. It is a brilliant and biting depiction, unsparing in its characterization.

A book which, though popular in manner should prove of importance to students of history is Johannes Nohl's chronicle of the Black Death through the ages entitled "Der Schwarze Tod" (Potsdam: Kiepenhauer). The work is based on contemporary records and is lavishly illustrated with reproductions of woodcuts which were called forth in such large numbers by the plague.

Trade Winds

IT was Young Amherst's idea to put up a sign in our window, QUESTIONS ANSWERED, which has led to Business. A young, moderately fair Englishwoman came in and said she was much troubled by the word "galluses" which she had seen in all the stories of Gorilla Warfare in Tennessee. For a long time she had hesitated to ask anyone, fearing the answer might be embarrassing; but the word was not in her Concise Oxford Dictionary and she could endure the suspense no longer. Suspense, said Young Amherst, is exactly what galluses are intended to perform. Probably the plural, he said, should be *galli*; at any rate, madam, in a word, *suspenders*. They got looking it up in the Oxford Dictionary, which defines suspenders as "attachments to which tops of socks or stockings are hung." They became quite merry over this and Young Amherst is writing to the Oxford dictionary to bring their learning up to date. From suspenders they rose to Russian fiction, and when they discovered that they both spelt Chehov the same way they were very happy. Like Oxford suspenders, it is a bond of union. Young Amherst sold her Gerhardt's magnificent book on Chehov; it was the only sale that afternoon.

Another inquiry elicited by Young Amherst's placard: "Where can I buy that book about Anatole France in Slippers, in the French?" Unluckily I was out of it, so I referred the lady to the excellent Pierre Jarry, who used to run the famous book-stall at the Brevoort; now he has opened his own shop *Au Coin de France* at 66 West 51, well stocked with all the current French books and magazines. When my Scandinavian soul is depressed with the uniformity of life I drop in at M. Jarry's and have a look at the Petites Annonces in *Le Sourire*. I often wonder what O. Henry would have thought of them as granules of short-story.

Best sellers in my shop the past fortnight (by which I mean the things it gave me the greatest pleasure to sell):—"The Travel Diary of a Philosopher," by Keyserling; Complete Prose, by Walt Whitman; "Dramatic Values," by C. E. Montague; Notebooks, by Samuel Butler; "The Crazy Fool," by Donald Ogden Stewart; Poems, by Emily Dickinson; "Serena Blandish," by A Lady of Quality.

It's queer how people's minds work. Not long ago, when there was some particularly comic controversy going on in the church, a downtown bookseller dug out of his stockroom a number of almost forgotten copies of "Scenes from Clerical Life." He put them in the window; within three days he had sold them all, and had an inquiry from a celluloid editor as to whether the book would make a good movie. The question is, what kind of excitement did

these people think it was? Perhaps one of those Ronald Press books about double-entry bookkeeping.

How I'd love to have seen Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Knopf arriving in a droschky at the Polish acres of Wladyslaw Reymont, and all the Polonaises gathered at the front postern to shout an old fashioned Borzoi greeting.

Mr. John Murray, advertising in the *London Times*:—"Barren Ground," a new novel by the author of "Black Oxen."
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