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Foreign Literature

A Charming Trifle

ADELAIDE SUIVI DE MLE. IRNOIS.
By the COMTE DE GOBINEAU. Paris:
Nouvelle Revue Française. 1924.

Reviewed by DOROTHEA CLAFLIN

"ADELAIDE" first appeared in 1913 in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. It is now published in book form by that press, accompanied by "Mlle. Irnois."

The story of Adelaide may be the fruit of Gobineau's diplomatic experiences. He attributed it to some small German court. Whatever its origin, it is a perfectly conceived trifle, merciless in its exposition of human nature, biting in its ironic analysis. The situation is distinctly original. A mother and daughter sharing a lover verges on the relationships of the Nibelungen Ring!

On the death of her husband, Mme. Hermansburg inveigles her lover, thirteen years younger, into marrying her. Rothbanner is sufficiently under the spell of Mme. Hermansburg's daughter, Adelaide, to give that very determined young woman an excuse to claim him. Vacillating and stupid, Rothbanner is helpless between the two women. The elder wins the first victory by marrying him, but the younger soon recaptures him.

Gobineau has sketched a faultless bit in his picture of the unfortunate man, between mother and daughter, his nose reddening and his eyes moistening where he cannot even find a word. For one brief moment his passion for Adelaide makes him an individual. But he couldn't stand the pace. Says Gobineau: "Entre nous, je crois qu'il était la machine à vapeur mal construite, pas trop capable de porter l'amour d'une Adelaide."

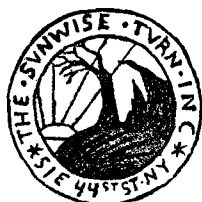
The result of all this (he continues) was quite bizarre, and might have surprised both the women; from so much fighting they found each other quite inexhaustible in resourcefulness, hatred and courage. They regarded each other with that secret esteem with which energetic people regard energy, even in their worst enemies. And, moreover, one fine day, they found themselves quite united by the intensity of their scorn for poor Rothbanner. I knew them all when the unfortunate man never dared come to table, to say nothing of meeting his wives in the course of the day. As a result, he managed to sleep all day long and only got up when the ladies were visiting or in their beds.

After some years of this life Adelaide decided to marry. She took a chamberlain whom she left at the end of a year to return to her mother. It was such a habit with these women to hate each other and to use their heaven-sent irony to slash each other with cutting words and to torture Rothbanner—the sole mark of attention which was left to him—that they had become inseparable and even those who profess love are not held together by such strength.

Mlle. Irnois was published in book form in 1920 and is reprinted in this volume. One of Gobineau's early works, it had great success. Delightfully written and original in its conception, the charm of its style hardly makes up for the unattractiveness of the heroine—a crippled idiot.

Gobineau's works, outside of his "Renaissance" are all too little known in America. To a real talent for the novel form, he joined the philosophy of a deeply thoughtful mind, and a brilliant gift for satire. "Les Pleiades," a novel of the latter part of his life, is an enchanting work, one of the few worthy of mention in the same breath with the *Stendhal's*.

The Centaur Book Shop has just published "A Bibliography of the Writings of Carl Van Vechten," by Scott Cunningham, with an introduction by Mr. Van Vechten. It contains a portrait, lists sixteen first editions, giving full descriptions and exhaustive notes, and includes a list of contributions to books, periodicals and critical essays, appreciations, interviews, and portraits. The edition is limited to 300 copies.



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Jewish Life

LA LEVITA GRIS. Por SAMUEL GLUSBERG. Buenos Aires: Editorial Babel. 1924.

WITH the tendency of the Jew to come to some form of intellectual activity in preference to any manual occupation a considerable literary production among the Russian and Polish Jews of the second generation born in Argentine soil is to be expected in the near future. To one of these groups belongs the author of this collection of short stories and sketches of Jewish life in Argentina. The same conflicting impulses of traditional feeling and modern ideas which causes the substitution of English for Hebrew or Yiddish among their coreligionists in the United States is causing the flourishing of a Spanish-Jewish literature among the settlers in Latin America. Also the same social forces working for disruption here, appear to be active there, embittering the conflict between the orthodox immigrant and the younger generation, rebellious to domestic authority and a prey to moral and intellectual anarchy. This alone holds many potential conflicts, furnishing dramatic background for limitless stories and plays in the Spanish-American Jewish literature of the future.

Not that this grafting process is entirely new to our letters, for it is well known to the historian of Spanish culture that the Sefardi Jew held a leading place in old Spain, and many of his cross-descendants brought to Spanish and Portuguese America their literary proclivities. In the province of Antioquia, in Colombia, there is an old settlement of Spanish Jews; and right here in New York City their Americanized brethren publish two periodicals in Spanish jargon with the Semitic alphabet. But enough is for the present in reminding the reader that the most widely read fiction book in Latin America for the last fifty years ("Maria," by Jorge Isaacs) is the work of one of those Colombian Jews.

In the brief tales by Samuel Glusberg we find as strong as ever that mixture of sentiment and irony so long identified with Jewish nature. A poetic feeling, subtle and remote as the spirit of the race itself, permeates many pages of his book. "Mate Amargo," one of its best stories, has the gloomy outlook on life the Jews seem to have caught through their long sojourn in Western Europe. Sketched against that violent cosmopolitan atmosphere of Buenos Aires, its old people inevitably remind us of the characters of Ruth Suckow, while some of the youthful creatures of Glusberg have more than a passing likeness with these argumentative, malicious youths of the London Ghetto as recorded by the masterful pen of Zangwill.

The richness of the Jewish temperament, its eager response to music and poetry are still there, together with the pitiful failings of the race and what in the language of the day may be termed its inhibitions. Yes even its irrepressible cynicism is presented as life's own instinct.

A Japanese novel, by Toyohiko Kagawa, the story of a poor Japanese student and idealist, and of his life among the poorest classes is shortly to be brought out in England. The book has sold in the neighborhood of 150,000 copies in Japan. It has been translated by two Japanese.

Raoul Stephen, author of "L'Homme-Chien" and "La Dévotion à l'Amour," a novel which has just been awarded a prize by the Société des Gens de Lettres, is to publish this year a curious psychological tale entitled "La Troublante Rencontre" (Albin). He has just completed a humorous novel in collaboration with Mme. Marth-Cleuzière.



Just Published

The Black Cargo

A Novel

By J. P. Marquand

Author of
"The Unspeakable Gentleman"



CAMERON ROGERS writes of this novel in the *World's Work*:

"In Eliphalet Greer, Mr. Marquand has created a very genuine and intensely moving character that dominates a narrative exceptionally successful in its recreation for the reader of the salt and the seaweed atmosphere of a seaport town in New England in the days when Yankee shipping was a byword of strength and intrepidity upon the seas. There is the sea in 'The Black Cargo,' but chiefly there is the atmosphere of the inns, the streets, and the docks in the town that the sea has begotten, an atmosphere utterly unique in the quality of its attraction.

"Mr. Marquand, like Mr. Hergesheimer, possesses the gift of placing the time and action of a story accurately and vividly within an historical period with the result that it reads like a diary of that period more than ordinarily filled with incident. There is no jarring modern note, no shattering anachronism to disturb the perfection of the impression created. And the impression is perfectly incisive."

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The New Orleans Water-front

Under the Levee

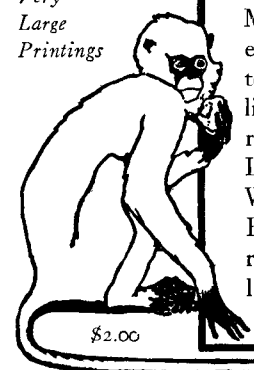
By E. Earl Sparling

"His characters have blood in their veins, they love, drink, fight, throw themselves away as cheerfully, as truly, as naturally as men in daily life. They move in their settings; you hear the wheezy piano in the joint by the water-front; you catch glimpses of strange figures moving about in the darkened shadows, you expect things to happen out of such as this—and you are not disappointed. Things do happen, thick, fast, pell-mell. Sinewy fellows come off the tramp steamers; there is drinking, gambling, some one is knifed up a dark areaway; raids come out of the darkness gathering hoodlums for the morning court session, the law looms over the Old Quarter, there is a scurrying of feet in the underworld, then it passes. Dancing recommences in the joints—there's a story afoot and Sparling knows how to tell it."—*Harlow's Weekly.*

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Russian Vignettes

By STEPHEN GRAHAM

THE Bolsheviks made Gorky their dictator of art and literature. They had Merezhkovsky in their midst, a man of real authority, but they knew better than to offer the post to him. They preferred to honor one of themselves. Nevertheless between Tolstoy and our day I suppose Merezhkovsky to be the most substantial figure in Russian literature. He is the dean of Russian letters, and one of the most respected men, not only among his own people but in Europe generally. Scholar, artist, thinker, he has been a man of great and manifold activity, notable in his latter years as a publicist, but famous in Europe for his "Leonardo da Vinci" and "Julian the Apostate"; famous in Russia for his powerful historical plays and religious and national essays.

He and his wife "Hippius," who is also a poet and playwright, remained in Petrograd through the stormy years 1914-1919. Living within sight of the Taurus Palace and the Duma, they witnessed, as it were from a little window, the tragedy of the revolution.

We followed the course of events by minutes (wrote Hippius) for we lived by the railings of the park on the first floor of the last house in one of the streets leading to the palace. Six years—six ages—I looked out from that window, or from the balcony. . . I watched the old palace die after it had been resurrected in new life. I saw the city die. Yes, the whole city built by Peter, sung by Pushkin; dear, severe, and dreadful city—it died. The last record in my diary was the pitiful story of its agony.

Merezhkovsky is a short, vivid, alert man in the sixties. His face is pale, his eyes deep set, but he does not bear the marks of the revolution in his body, which seems youthful. His mind has what seemed to me a boyish excitability. It fires rapidly like trains of powder. His wife is much younger, with a wreathed glory of copper-glinting hair above an open countenance. Hippius has, however, a slightly troubled expression, as if for some reason she had been constantly called upon to revise her previous opinions of men and things. She has always lived for and in the life of other human beings, whereas her husband, for the most part, has been in the realm of ideas and abstractions.

I spent a pleasant evening with them in Paris, where they live very simply in a third floor flat on the Avenue Bonnet, his own old Paris apartment preserved since before the war. Some philanthropist must pay the rent for the other literary celebrities in Paris. None of them seem to me to have more than the barest means of sustenance. Their literary income must be derived from the sale of foreign rights, and one knows what meagre sums that affords. Hippius, however, had had her play "The Green Ring" performed by the Neighborhood Players in New York, and Merezhkovsky places his new books in Germany and France as they come out. He seemed rather chagrined because he had not found a publisher for his new book on Tutenkhamen either in England or America. This volume is called "The Birth of the Gods" and it has lately appeared in Paris.

I asked Merezhkovsky what he thought of the future, but I found him pessimistic, not believing that Bolshevism would soon come to an end.

It was what many thinkers feared (said he),—Dostoevsky when he wrote "Demons"; Solovyov when he wrote of the end of history. You have made a tour of the Soviet frontier, but where is that frontier? It is not simply geographical—it is in the human soul. The religious expression of the Orient is becoming negative. The Devil has a power (Merezhkovsky called it Antichrist) which is still mobilizing and concentrating. Perhaps we shall not live to see its ultimate defeat.

The Russian philosopher has the virtue of talking like a book. I recognized the Merezhkovsky style so familiar in the old days in the *Russkoe Slovo* in his essays directed against Gorky and in defense of Dostoevsky's ideas.

The danger in his method of prophecy is the tendency to fit in human history to a pre-ordained plan. It is safer to modify one's theories of human destiny by deductions from current events. There is an incalculability in life which has ever baffled science and falsified prophecy. Eternity, moreover, is painfully undramatic—or at least appears so to mortals who think of life as a five-act play.

One of Merezhkovsky's ideas is that the

Bolshevik and the Burzhui are close akin; the one is the other turned inside out. By Burzhui he means the European business man in general, and he ventured the opinion that there was a secret sympathy between the two. "Always, when Bolshevism is on the brink of the precipice, a hand is stretched out to save it, and that hand is a business hand. The world therefore could only be saved by a third party—what one might call Christian mankind." In Russia especially he expects liberation from the peasantry, though if the peasantry fail us he reckons that the days of Europe's civilization are numbered. Europe began to be through Christianity, and when Christianity goes our Europe must go with it.

We had some argument about this. For I hold that the British business man, at least, does not correspond to the "Burzhui." He may be at times prosaic and narrow, but in general he is honest and kind, is possessed of a practical common sense, and is on the side of life and human happiness throughout the world. Even should Europe with its mixed nations go to bits, the Anglo-Saxon world is likely to remain.

Concerning this it was clear that Merezhkovsky had some doubt. He has an immense respect for England and America.

It seemed to me that there were two Merezhkovskys: one a Cassandra warning the Trojans, and another a Trojan ignoring Cassandra. When he stooped down from his place of prophecy he was an engaging, enthusiastic, fighting man; hoping for victories, deploring accidents, sorrowing over disillusion. It was only when he began to check his daily hopes and fears by his own great knowledge of history and by his formulated plan of the future that Merezhkovsky's ardent personality seemed to pass under a sombre cloud. He often becomes silent, and broods—on all that has been, on all that yet must be.

Probably the only Russian writer who has gained in prestige during the seven years of revolution is Ivan Bunin. He was never popular, but he has gained the suffrage of his fellow-writers. He is a writer's writer. He is known in England by "The Village" and "The Gentleman from San Francisco," and here also his appeal is somewhat limited. When I called on him in Paris recently I found an American trying to discover whether he had any sensational matter which he could take to New York and publish. But Bunin, while reasonably ambitious to see more of his work in English, reminded him carefully that he only wrote for the few. "You will never see people reading my books in railway carriages," said he.

Bunin belongs to a somewhat radical tradition in literature. Revolutionary Russia would have been glad to possess him, and

I suppose, had the revolution been decent and democratic, Bunin would never have fled from it. But Bolshevik Russia has no more uncompromising opponent in the world of literature and art than he. His resistance has gained him the reputation of being bitter. But that is a mistake. He is a gentle, sympathetic man with an engaging, sing-song voice. He talks of Russia with humor, with a lively wit, and smiles and coaxes to gain you to his opinion.

Artsibashev, whom I met in Warsaw last autumn, is more the embittered type. He had all the bourgeois world at his feet in 1917. But Bunin never had literary glory and is nearer fame now than then. His attitude toward the Bolsheviks therefore has no bias derived merely from the loss of readers.

Bunin is a bright-faced, slightly-built man of middle years; he looks as if he had lived with the moujiks a good deal and has a reflection of the provincial in his face, the village felscher perhaps. He left Russia in 1918 while it was still not difficult to get away, passing through the German lines to Odessa. Thence he made his way to Paris, where he has been living for some years. He has no intention of returning until there is a change of régime.

"Practically the whole balance of Russian artistic and cultural life is now abroad," said he. "Of those writers who have remained behind the most substantial are those who made their names before the war. There is the novelist Andrey Biely; there is Anna Akhmatova, but she belongs more to us than to them. Alexey Tolstoy left us, and he truly is a man of talent though of weak character."

"Most of the young Bolshevik writers go in for the ultra-natural style, neo-realism, they call it. It is a brutal product of the time, horrible and foul. Pilniak, for instance—he was among us before the revolution. I knew him. He stayed with the Bolsheviks, went with the time. He goes in for this ultra-naturalism—looks on famine, bloodshed, typhus, bestiality, describes the most distressing and dreadful scenes on the Volga in the famine area, and feels nothing himself. He knows what the people have gone through, but condones it, gets famous on it."

"But they say that drama makes progress under Lunacharsky," I urged.

"What sort of progress? Not one single play has come out of Russia since the revolution. The Theatre of Art carries on with its old repertoire edited and censored by the Bolsheviks. Those in power have no taste for drama, do not understand anything that is really worth while. You find the Chekists instructing the Theatre of Art to do them a version of 'La Fille de Madame Angot'. Is there anything new in that?"

"What do you think of the excuse commonly given by writers in Soviet Russia,

that they feel they must remain in their country if they are to continue writing?" I asked.

"That's a fine old-fashioned excuse," said Bunin. "Did Alexey Tolstoy need to go and look at Russia again in order to refresh his memory? Do I need to go and look at the Russian peasant again to know what he is like and what is in him? One can write as well in exile as at home. Think of Victor Hugo, or of Ovid, or again of our great Turgeniev wandering over Western Europe nearly all his creative life!"

I thought of Dostoevsky's quarrel with Turgeniev in this matter and his "Are you sure you can see us as well from Berlin? May I not send you a telescope so that you can see Russia better?" But I did not say it. It is a matter on which there can be two opinions. Certainly it should refresh the eyes of a Russian artist to see his Russia again, even in her misery, even in her despair. But Bunin is one of the literary political champions of the great "Emigration." He triumphantly expects the disintegration of Bolshevism and will not take half a step to break its fall. He is for the complete disassociation of Russian artists and writers from the Soviet power. He considers that the present rulers of Russia have destroyed even the minimum of liberty, have suffocated all creative thought, science, and literature; and having maimed art, go in now for artistic stunts solely for purposes of political agitation. And that being so, he considers it a crime against the real Russia to coöperate with the Bolsheviks in any way. He believes that a strong Conservative government of some kind will eventually take the place of the present tyranny; it may be a monarchy, it may be a strong government of another kind, but the unity of the old Russia will be reestablished, the emigrants will return and the present rulers will be swept away. In Bunin one sees an uncompromising critic of the revolution and an unqualified believer in the coming restoration.

E. C. Ranck is working on the authorized life of Madison Cawein, the Kentucky poet, a book which will largely be based upon Mr. Otto A. Rothert's admirable study of Cawein. If anyone has any letters of Cawein not included in Mr. Rothert's book, or any anecdotes or stories of Cawein, Mr. Ranck will appreciate communication with him at The Hermitage Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky.

The Board of Trade of Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn, recently took steps to honor the memory of Walt Whitman who lived for many years in the Myrtle Avenue section and wrote several of his most famous poems in a house at Adams Street, later at 71 Prince Street, and at 106 Myrtle Avenue, at the corner of Bridge Street. It is the intention of the committee to erect appropriate tablets and also to maintain somewhere in the district a permanent Walt Whitman room devoted to the collection of Whitmaniana.

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