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Carl Spitteler

By JAMES F. MUIRHEAD

ENGLAND has long been inured to the charge of insularity, and even the United States, in spite of its general broad-mindedness, is sometimes accused of too exclusive a preoccupation with its own interests. Perhaps both countries must plead guilty on this score for their attitude of indifference to Carl Spitteler—a man who won the Nobel Prize for Literature, who was singled out for special honour by the French Academy, and who is greatly admired and widely read by the cultivated classes of all German-speaking nations.

England is the greater of the two sinners. Nothing by Spitteler has there (so far as I can ascertain) ever been translated into English, and nothing seems to have been written about him except incidental notices on his winning of the Nobel Prize in 1919 and at his death in 1924. The library of the British Museum contains most of his works, and several commentaries on them by foreign writers; but no English name appears in the Catalogue in connection with his. A diligent oral questionnaire among my friends has not succeeded in finding a single individual who had ever read a line of him.

America is in slightly better case. A translation of a small book he wrote for children seems to have been published in New York in 1922;* but I have not yet been able to obtain a copy of this. Some general attention has also been paid to him in such books as "The Nobel Prize Winners," by Mrs. A. L. Marble, and "Ten Literatures," by Mr. Ernest Boyd. But to those who know and appreciate their Spitteler, this seems as absurdly inadequate as if Victor Hugo were known to English readers only through two short magazine articles and a translation of one of his briefest and least important works.

Turning to other countries and passing over his popularity with the Swiss and other German-speaking races, we find that at least five of his works have been translated into French and that he has many readers in France, a country not preëminently hospitable to books in German. Among his French admirers are such men as M. Romain Rolland and M. Baudouin, both of whom have devoted much energy to critical analysis of his poems and have indulged themselves in phrases of a most appreciative character. And now we are told that a translation of an eulogium by M. Rolland has excited so much interest among the students of Calcutta that they are diligently learning German in order to read Spitteler in the original.

To quality Spitteler adds quantity as a claim on our attention. His "Olympian Spring" consists of 18,000 lines, in rhymed couplets. His prose epic "Prometheus and Epimetheus" contains 100,000 words. "Prometheus der Dulder," a recasting in verse of his prose poem, has nearly 7,000 lines. He published three or four volumes of shorter poems. His prose works include several romances, a charming account of his infancy, and a volume of literary and artistic criticism. I am far from considering bulk as in itself a claim for attention. But we are entitled to take number as well as merit into account when we compare Shakespeare's Sonnets with Blanco White's "Night and Death." And there are very few lines of Spitteler I should like to see blotted.

I confess that since my youthful study of Virgil, Homer, Milton, and Goethe, my epical reading has been distinctly limited. I never succeeded in finishing "The Faerie Queen." Doughty's "Dawn in Britain" was altogether too much for me. Nor have I read the whole of the "Orlando Furioso," a poem to which Spitteler was introduced by Jakob Burckhardt, and which is believed to have influenced Spitteler's whole literary career. Hardy's "Dynasts" is rather a dramatic poem than an epic. But, at an age at which one could hardly expect a new (poetic) planet to swim into his ken, I have read all three of Spitteler's epics with keen enjoyment, and have every intention of reading at least large parts of them again.

Spitteler's life was comparatively uneventful. He was born in 1845 at Liestal, a small town in the Swiss canton of Bâle University, he spent several years in teaching and journalism, partly in Russia. In 1881 he published "Prometheus and Epimetheus," under the pseudonym of "Felix Tandem." The indifferent reception of

this great work, on which he had spent many years of labor, determined him to abandon literature as a career; but chance made him pecuniarily independent in 1892, and from that date till his death at the close of 1924 he lived at Lucerne, producing a long series of poems and other prose works. "Schmetterlinge" (Butterflies), a collection of short poems, appeared in 1889, and was followed by four volumes of prose. The Swiss critic, J. V. Widmann, literary editor of the *Berner Bund*, became his active champion; but it was an enthusiastic pamphlet of Felix Weingartner, the well-known conductor and composer, published in 1904, that first made Spitteler known outside of Switzerland. Spitteler always called Weingartner his "discoverer." Weingartner's enthusiasm was due mainly to "Olympian Spring," the first draft of which was issued between 1900 and 1905 (final version in 1910). And it was chiefly for this wonderful poem that the Nobel prize was awarded to him in 1919.

Two other volumes of short poems ("Balladen" and "Glockenlieder") appeared in 1896 and 1906. His closing years were occupied in a poetical "Umdichtung" or recasting of his philosophic prose epic on the story of Prometheus, and this was published in 1924, under the title of "Prometheus der Dulder," or "Prometheus the Patient."

If space allowed, an analysis of the "Prometheus" would probably be the best introduction to Spitteler, the philosophic poet. This, however, would be a complicated and far-reaching task, and a few tentative and general words must suffice. His preoccupation with "Prometheus" from his earliest to his latest days irresistibly recalls the parallel case of Goethe and "Faust." The analogy, however, is mainly external. Spitteler is no more a mere follower of Goethe than is the author of "Peer Gynt." His subject, as of every epic worthy of the name, is Humanity—its woes, its joys, its struggles towards the light. His hero Prometheus represents the free, unshackled man, who follows implicitly the commands of his "Herrin Seele" a term which cannot be adequately translated by either "Soul" or "Ideal." The "Seele" is personified as a lovely but severe Goddess. Epimetheus according to ordinary standards, a highly estimable personage, is the man who is content with something less than the highest, who allows a touch of the expedient and conventional to interpose between himself and the abstract ideal. The poet does not stick at all closely to the story of classical mythology. He recasts it for his own purposes, invents his own episodes and imagery, and steeps his theme in an atmosphere of the most glowing romance. The earlier draft of the poem is written in a naïve, short-sentenced, quasi-Biblical, rhythmical prose, which obviously gave Nietzsche his model for "Zarathustra" (published a few years later). No doubt it is possible to find in the "Olympian Spring" ("Olympischer Frühling") a very considerable amount of philosophy, symbolism, and satire. On first acquaintance, however, my advice would be to approach it in the naïve spirit of a child and read it simply as an enthralling fairy-tale. It represents the heroic and romantic side of Spitteler's muse, just as the "Prometheus" represents his mystic and prophetic vein. Here, too, the poet uses the ancient mythological scenario with great freedom. The general theme is the advent to supreme power of Zeus and the Olympians, after the overthrow of Kronos and the Titans; it is at once a Götterdämmerung and a Götterwachen. It is divided into five parts: the Ascent to Olympus, Hera the Bride, The High Noon or Meridian of the Olympians, End of the High Noon, Zeus. The last part of Book V. is devoted to Heracles, the mortal son of Zeus, who faces the task in which his divine father has failed, with determined courage though almost without hope. The poem ends on this Promethean note of loyalty to the highest that we know, whatever may be our own fate. If a second maxim may be drawn from the epic, it is that life, with all its evils, wears a shining and consoling crown of beauty.

Hera is represented as the Queen of the Amazons, destined, under the all-compelling decree of Ananke (when Spitteler makes masculine), to become the none-too-willing bride of Zeus. Ajax is one of the Olympians, not a Greek Hero. And so on. Totally new mythological characters are introduced, such as the dwarf Hyphaist, the divine child Eidolon, the ogre Pelarg, the diabolic rebel Kakokles, and Theopomp,

Hera's master of ceremonies; and their stories are interwoven with those of names well-known to the schoolboy. Such charming episodes as Hylas and Kaledusa, Apollo the Discoverer, and the various athletic contests of the Olympians, can be read and enjoyed as if they were independent poems, though their bearing on the central theme is clear enough to prevent them from being merely interruptions of the general story. The inventiveness of the different episodes shows the art of the consummate story-teller. The sumptuous pageantry of the descriptions, whether of action or of scenery, is overwhelming in its pictorial and musical effect. The whole poem (and in this respect it differs from most epics) is lit up by a genial and fascinating humor, the genesis of which may be due to the influence of Ariosto, operating on a native gift. The human interest is all-pervading, for Spitteler's Olympians are at least as human as their Greek prototypes. The many new compound words used by the poet (a device to which the German tongue easily lends itself) are notable for their poetic quality, perspicacity, and aptness. They strike the reader, not as applied ornament, but as the inevitable expression of the poet's thought. The alternation of male and female rhymes in the six-foot iambic couplets gives the necessary variety and elasticity to the verse. The scenery, so vividly described in these cantos, is obviously that of Switzerland; and many passages are based on personal experiences that we find described in his "Earliest Recollections" and elsewhere. Whatever else may be said of the "Olympian Spring," it is one of the most gorgeous and enthralling stories "ever said in rhyme."

No space is left to speak of Spitteler's other works, including the prose essays on art, music, and literature which made Nietzsche term him the greatest writer on aesthetics in the German tongue. Most of these are well worth reading, though a few, perhaps, are too "Swiss" and too "dated" to make any particular appeal to American readers. But this word "Swiss" reminds me to note in conclusion that Spitteler, both in form and spirit is very far from being a "German" author in any commonly understood sense. As a native of Alemannic Switzerland, he naturally had to use the language to which he was born; but I do not think anyone can read him without feeling that he is essentially a Swiss, representing very fully and emphatically that fusion of Latin and Teutonic elements which have gone to make Switzerland what it is. And we recognize even more deeply that there is something in Spitteler which could not have originated anywhere but among the Alpine heights and free institutions of this little patch of Europe.

Foreign Notes

Max Dauthendey, one of the most noteworthy of recent German poets, died in 1917 in Java, whither ill-health had driven him before the outbreak of the war. Parts of the diary he kept while in exile have now been posthumously published under the title "Erlebnisse auf Java, und den Tagebüchern von Max Dauthendey" (Munich: Langen). The book falls into two main parts, the one depicting scenes and contrasts of Javanese life and the other recounting the ascent of the Smeroe mountain. It is a piece of lively and distinguished writing, some of the best that has been spent on its subject, Java.

E. M. Forster is to deliver the Clark lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge. There will be ten of them and his subject will be some aspect or other of the novel.

In his "Altre Pagine sulla Grande Guerra" (Milan: Mondadori), Marshal Luigi Cadorna has issued four essays dealing with side issues of the war. Students of the conflict should find them of considerable interest.

Mr. Austin, for forty years the stage-door keeper at Covent Garden, has written a book of his reminiscences which is to include many stories about Melba.

"The Correspondence of Gray, Walpole, West and Ashton, 1734-1771," published by the Oxford University Press, includes more than 100 letters now first published. Another publication of the same press, "Reminiscences Written by Mr. Horace Walpole in 1788," for the amusement of Miss Mary and Miss Agnes Berry, now first printed in full from the original manuscript, is of interest to booklovers. The edition, which is limited to 500 copies, is printed in the manner of the Strawberry Hill Press on pure rag paper and bound in boards.

*Die Mädchenfeinde, translated, under the title of "Two Little Misogynists," by Mme. la Vicomtesse La Roquette-Buisson.

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later

Art

CHINESE LACQUER. By EDWARD F. STRANGE. Scribner's. 1926. \$35.

Up to the present no book on Chinese lacquer existed and except for some introductions to catalogues and some articles in magazines, no information on this subject was available. Edward F. Strange's work will therefore be a very welcome addition to the libraries of those interested in Chinese art. The book is beautifully illustrated with black and white color reproductions of pieces in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in some private and dealers' collections; it is thoroughly and painstakingly compiled, and contains a great deal of useful information. Though chiefly treating of the eighteenth century lacquer with a marked preference for the carved cinabar lacquer it contains two very interesting chapters on the technique and the history of lacquer in China. In the chapter on the technique interesting facts will be found on the making of originals as well as of imitations and common pieces.

The historical part deals with the very early pieces which have lately been found in excavations, which date as far back as 600 B. C., but none of these are illustrated; the Ming period is fairly represented, but the remarkable early lacquered pieces with silver inlay which are so wonderfully represented in the Shosoin in Nara and the similar pieces found in Chinese tombs are not specially discussed. The author's chief interest evidently lies with the Ming and eighteenth century lacquers, the gorgeous carved red lacquer objects, and the Coronandel screens.

It is therefore chiefly for the collectors of these very decorative pieces that the book will be of great value. But also for the few more archaeologically inclined it contains some very valuable information; at least it will give them the desire to know something more of the origin of the lacquerer's art which is here shown in its proudest developments. Several chapters are added on the symbols and meanings of the decorations which will be of great use to all those interested in these subjects.

On the whole "Chinese Lacquers" is a valuable addition to our books on Chinese arts and crafts and treats in a very thorough way with this subject which up to now could only be studied in chapters found here and there in general books on Chinese art.

RELATION IN ART. By VERNON BLAKE. Illustrated. Oxford University Press. 1926.

We have here within rather small compass a closely reasoned æsthetic and its application as criticism to the various usual arts. The author is well read in general philosophy and in the modern metaphysics of science, but apparently quite without reading in his own science. Nor does this seem a disadvantage in a book which, being based on long meditation and practice of the arts, is entirely lived and personal. Within the allotted space, only a hint of the theory can be given. It proceeds from the postulate that the universe is both highly complex and entirely orderly. This order may be apprehended by men but not directly. The scientist apprehends it by hypotheses which, themselves false, are parallel with the ultimate reality. The artist's intuition similarly finds parallels for the general order in his own thinking, and projects in his appropriate medium visual analogies for his intuition; and finally the observer draws from the work of art his own analogies, which parallel the entire series faithfully.

The artist's intuition is of two sorts, he may assert the unity and order of the universe, in which case his art will seek absolute form; or he may assert the complexity and variety of the universe, in which case his art will seek an indefinite suggestiveness. We evidently have here a clearer and more psychological definition of the old vague terms classic and romantic.

This will be enough to show that the author as critic will study chiefly the rhetoric of the work of art, but with the difference from many critics who do this by rule of thumb, that he will always refer rhetorical judgments to a high court of philosophy.

For all but specialists, the theoretical part of the book will be hard reading. Indeed the unmetaphysical art-lover may be advised to begin with the second, critical, part. It is a discussion of working proc-

esses, in the visual arts cutting across usual lines of period and school, and it abounds in mature and profound appreciation of particular artists, and works of art with enlightening analysis from literature and music.

Belles Lettres

FROM GOETHE TO HAUPTMANN. By CAMILLO VON KLENZ. Viking Press. 1926. \$2.50.

This volume is properly a group of essays in comparative literature. Although the author makes his starting point from German literature, he roams over the entire range of modern literature in the attempt to locate literary sources and cultural influences. Moreover, he visualizes literature as the conscious expression of human culture, and in his critical method he is a humanist very much after the manner of Irving Babbitt. Being of German origin, however, his antipathy to romanticism is less marked.

In the first essay the point is very well made that Italy had affected with its beauty such northern visitors as Cochin, Winckelmann, and Goethe, and through them the entire culture of northern Europe. The second essay traces carefully Ruskin's views

of art to the writings of the early German romantics. The third discusses the fiction of Gottfried Keller and Conrad Frederick Meyer in the light of the development of the novel during the nineteenth century. In the fourth such dramatists as Kleist, Grillparzer, Hebbel, and Anzengruber are shown to bridge the gap between Schiller's exalted tragedies and Hauptmann's "Weavers." The final essay depicts the change in attitude in the working classes from the time of Castiglione to the present, and how this change is reflected in the writings of such men as Zola, Tolstoy, and Hauptmann. The volume is unquestionably an important contribution to the expanding field of comparative literature. It shows, however, greater scholarship than originality, and its value lies in the bringing together into a related whole material which hitherto was to be found scattered and without literary unity.

Biography

LATER DAYS. By W. H. DAVIES. Doran. \$2.

We cannot regard this as what its publishers call it, "a sparkling sequel to 'The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp.'" The omnipresent naïveté of Mr. Davies in this small volume before us reveals much unconscious humor, but the conscious fooling is heavy and clumsy, the egocentricity rather appalling. W. H. Davies is a reckorable poet. He had much better leave his biography in other hands. He displays no

gift for it. His anecdotes of the writers he has known are rather banal. The most interesting person in his book of recollections, as he presents them, is the tramp who sold the wooden umbrella.

The simple charm of some of Davies's poetry resides in a lack of the self-consciousness which is painfully obtrusive in his prose. And the strangely felicitous phrase that sometimes bubbles up regardless in his verse is absent in this heavier medium.

Fiction

TEMPER. By LAWRENCE H. CONRAD. Dodd, Mead. 1926. \$2.

First published more than two years ago, this remarkable novel well merits its present re-issue and the attention of serious-minded readers who overlooked its preceding appearance. It is the grim, melancholy story of a young Italian immigrant's struggle to rise from obscurity, from the lowly station of an unskilled factory worker and above the inherent limitations of his own nature. As a harshly realistic study of industrial conditions and of exalted, but futile, aspiration, the book is a memorable and masterly work.

TRAVELLING MEN. By W. G. DOWSLEY. Stokes. 1926. \$2.

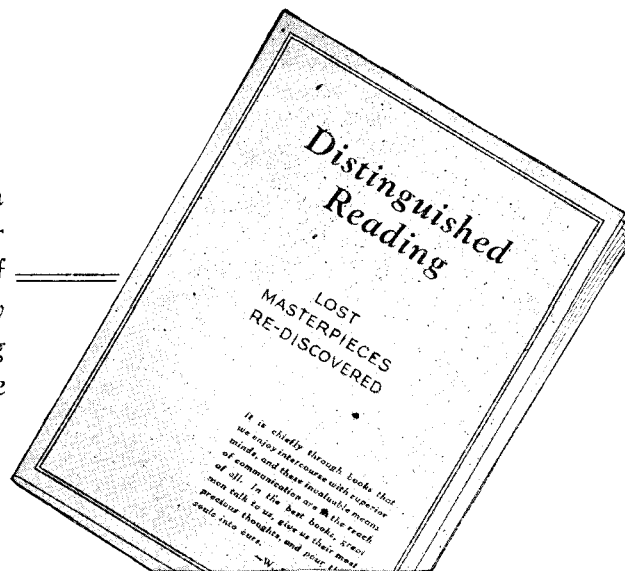
Southern Ireland in 1816, when the shadow of '98 still oppressed the Gaelic soul and the memory of heroic Emmet kept

(Continued on next page)

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