

Foreign Literature

Thomas Mann

BEMÜHUNGEN VON THOMAS MANN.
Berlin: Fischer. 1926.

Reviewed by PIERRE LOVING

IT is quite safe to say of Thomas Mann that he almost invariably achieves what he sets out to do. This may be affirmed of many a lesser artist in prose; it may be affirmed indeed of the smallest fry among novelists anywhere in the world. Hence as a perspective in criticism this sort of touchstone has little meaning. It was Goethe who defined, in a conversational epigram, the goal of the individual artist as the thing by which he must ultimately be judged, and we have had no end of variations on this theme by succeeding aestheticians and critics. In point of fact, no artist can be estimated solely by his ends, assuming that he always knows what they are; and no painter or writer ever lived completely within his own frame. He moves us, touches us only because of his vital relation to life, and his work is only one expression of a group of forces.

Thomas Mann, we perceive at once, is the type of prose writer who is immensely conscious and alive to his ends and the modes by which he can best overtake them. He has almost entirely thrown over the notion of "plot" in fiction. Instead of plot, he chooses a pattern, which may or may not involve an emotional climax. The reader responds to the rhythmic pattern; the precise narrative event does not touch him so much as something that is under the surface of the calm, beautifully flowing prose. This is a hazardous method—one at which the later Henry James failed as often as he succeeded.

The present volume is a collection of essays and talks. The style and method by which we have come to recognize the essential Thomas Mann is apparent here as in the novels. We need not be told, as Thomas Mann once told the writer, that he always works within a self-directed pattern; that his writing is founded on Wagnerian music; that he employs a *leitmotif* stitched into an intricate tapestry of form. We are fully aware of it at once; we sense it indeed from the tug and sway of our own sensations in the grip of this lucid, organic prose.

The most important essay in the book is undoubtedly the one on Tolstoy and Goethe. Who but Thomas Mann would have thought of bringing these two figures together within the framework of one essay? The initial effect is one of surprise and then, through his skilful musicianship—a quality, by the way, which Mr. Shaw has recently discovered in Shakespeare—he weaves the two nominal aliens together; he has them meet through the agency of a Weimar schoolmaster who knew them both; he shows their points of contact, their classicism, their vitality. He shows them both, too, as the spoiled children of nature. And being children of nature, destined to big ends, they themselves scarcely knew whither they were heading. He contrasts Schiller, the disciple of the "spirit" with Goethe, and Dostoevsky with Tolstoy. He brings Schiller with his constant genuflection to nobility of mind startlingly close to Dostoevsky with his mysticism, self-abnegation, and saint's pride. He shows that "children of nature," like Tolstoy and Goethe, never have need to study nature—they are nature made human; they cannot loose themselves from her fertilizing clasp. They may at times wrong themselves; often they write badly, ineptly, or in an obstinate fashion; but they may not escape their lot: in the end the guardian earth-mother will lead them back to their rightful ways, which are her ways.

I cannot begin to express the depth and beauty of this essay. It would be futile to isolate any separate part for quotation—idea and pattern are too closely one. If the point of contact between Goethe and Tolstoy were not, to begin with, envisaged by Thomas Mann through intuition, of what avail would the mere pattern be? His prose method is like some Calvary on the side of an ancient hill: the end we know in advance, as though human suffering, pity, or worship sensed the mark it aimed at, but the stations are fixed by the windings and turnings of the path and are revealed to us as, pilgrim-wise, we climb upward. If we heed the signposts with befitting fervor, the reward will await us at the terminus.

The present volume once again proves that Thomas Mann, author of "Buddenbrooks," "Death in Venice," and "Tristan," belongs indeed to the consciousness of Europe.

More Brandes

PETRUS. By GEORG BRANDES. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. 1926.

Reviewed by JULIUS MORITZEN

WHATEVER may be Georg Brandes's purpose in devoting his declining years to a historical research of the leading characters in the Bible, just as his "Legend About Jesus" called forth a storm of disapproval last year on the part of scholars of recognized authority in that particular domain, so his "Petrus" has met with no less decided opposition in quarters supposedly well informed in matters of that nature.

Brandes takes the position that there is little of authentic information to make Simon Peter the outstanding figure that the Bible makes him out, and he is doing his best to remove the apostle, if possible, from the realm of history. To say that for this reason his last book is not worth reading would be beyond the mark. Georg Brandes always writes entertainingly whether one agrees with his findings or not. His style, further, is as luminous as ever, even if in the case of his biblical criticism he will find many who totally disagree with him. Finding fault with the Bible on the score of historical accuracy, however, is nothing new in literature, and it is only because of Brandes's exceptional position as a writer of world-renown that in the present instance the reader looks closely to the substance matter presented.

There are few Bible scholars in Denmark ready to say that the Apostle Peter is a figment of the imagination. In fact, so noted a scholar as Professor Ditleif Nielsen on the appearance of "Petrus" declared that if Brandes kept up the pace begun of late he no doubt would dispose of Paul and all the other evangelical characters. Professor Nielsen, whose work, "The Historical Jesus," allows considerable freedom in individual interpretation of the Nazarene, takes the position that it is futile to enter a protest against Georg Brandes with regard to his most recent contributions.

One who has followed Georg Brandes with an enthusiasm based on what this Danish critic has accomplished with such outstanding works as his "Shakespeare," "Goethe," "Julius Caesar," "Voltaire," and "Michelangelo" is bound to express regret that the octogenarian critic has permitted himself to drift into a field where unquestionably he is not fully at home.

It is to be hoped that his more recent contributions will not be permitted to dim the position that he is entitled to by virtue of the great things he has written.



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hugs it to his tenderest rib.

DAVID GARNETT
is absorbed by it.

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is enchanted by it.

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is enlivened by it.

FANNY BUTCHER
cannot forget it.

LLEWELYN JONES
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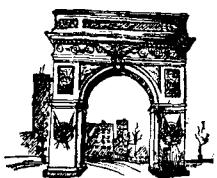
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A London Letter

By RODERICK RANDOM

AT a time when most of the spring books have been issued and publishers have not yet disclosed their autumn lists, it is perhaps permissible for even a mere letter-writer to sit back and survey the array of sedulous book-producers and ask himself who are coming to the fore. This topic is suggested to me by a recent article published by M. André Maurois in Paris listing those "young" English novelists whom he considers to be in the lead. Such lists are familiar, and without doubt they must be useful to the novel-reader eager for some order in his reading.

The first that I recollect was one drawn up by Henry James in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1912 or so, wherein he dealt encouragingly with his juniors. Those juniors were: H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett. James was followed within two years by W. L. George in the *Oxford and Cambridge Review* with a longer list of "the novelists of promise who sprang up about 1911." These were: J. D. Beresford, Gilbert Cannan, E. M. Forster, Compton Mackenzie, Hugh Walpole, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and, as an afterthought, Perceval Gibbon. It is curious to contrast those two lists today, James's and George's.

The James novelists, with the inevitable exception of Conrad, are still "going strong." Moreover, Arnold Bennett showed lately, in "Riceyman Steps," that he can approach his very best work, and H. G. Wells, if reports are correct, is about to produce what may well rank at his most ambitious fiction, his "Wilhelm Meister," which, as it happens, is about a William also—"The World of William Clissold." The first edition of this, limited to 500 copies, will be in six volumes, in each one of which William Clissold surveys his world from a different angle. Clissold is a man of sixty, and it should be noted that Mr. Wells himself will be that age on September 21 next. It is bound to be a book that will arouse exceptional interest. Ernest Benn is bringing it out here and Doran in New York, both publishing Mr. Wells for the first time.

The "veterans" then are still very much to be reckoned with. But where are the 1911 novelists of promise? True, the War killed off none; they are all still alive and all are busily writing. Yet nobody surely will pretend that, with the exception of E. M. Forster, any of them is now doing work of the slightest account. The very names of J. D. Beresford and Gilbert Cannan have almost been forgotten by critics of standing, and Compton Mackenzie, Hugh Walpole, and Sheila Kaye-Smith have developed into best-sellers, efficient producers of machine-made plots, or rather of repetitions of their first successful plot. Some may think this an exaggeration; literally, perhaps yes, but in spirit, it is no exaggeration. All five have ceased to have "promise." Gibbon I need not even discuss.

There remains E. M. Forster, and it must be pointed out that Forster, though he is in years considerably the junior of Wells and Bennett, had begun to produce books long before 1911. Yet there he was in W. L. George's list, and now here he bobs up in M. Maurois's list of "young English novelists." M. Maurois, however, avoids the word "promise" in connection with Forster, as with his other names. Instead of "promising work," M. Maurois says: "important work." He regards Forster as "young" no doubt, but also as mature. Why, one may ask, has Forster survived the while the Beresfords, the Cannans, the Mackenzies, etc., have, critically speaking, vanished? I think the answer might have been discerned as far back as 1911 by anyone sufficiently prescient. It is namely that Mr. Forster from the outset has displayed in his writing a feeling, an atmosphere that his contemporaries, even when they had promise, lacked. By atmosphere I mean what Mr. Forster himself means in his Hogarth Essay on Anonymity, which appeared in America in the *Atlantic Monthly*, when he quotes "A slumber did my spirit seal" as being a sentence conveying atmosphere in contrast to the sentence that just gives information.

It is edifying to find the judgment of England and America, particularly America, being reinforced in this particular case by the approval of France, the home of literary criticism. But it is time I mentioned the three other names on M. Maurois's list. They are: Virginia Woolf, David Garnett, and Aldous Huxley. Altogether, one must agree, a remarkable

quartet, but I don't think personally that anyone of the last three has so far written anything worthy of rank beside "A Passage to India."

Frankly, it seems to me that the current tendency is rather to overrate Virginia Woolf. Her friend, Mr. Forster, has been saying in *The New Criterion* (in the *Yale Review* in America) that her latest, "Mrs. Dalloway," is her most successful novel. Assuming this, then, and considering what her French champion, M. Maurois, says of it:

We follow Mrs. Dalloway to her florist, her confectioner, along the pavements of Bond Street, and, without our understanding very well how it comes about, her life, that of her husband, the lives of her friends, the lives of the occupants of the big car that makes people all turn their heads, the life of that poor lunatic who wanders on the arm of his wife interpreting all he sees as a piece of his dream, the life of the alienist doctor, the lives of the nurses sitting at the foot of the trees in Kensington Gardens (M. Maurois means Regent's Park) pass through the book, become known to us, and move us. A kind of practical mysticism leads us into the very heart of the life of the town. It is indeed very beautiful.

one must say (and incidentally I don't suppose Mrs. Woolf's book could be described more sympathetically than it is in the above passage) that while that is no doubt the author's purpose and aim, she really does not quite bring it off. It has seemed to one reader, at any rate, that Mrs. Woolf does not actually know Mrs. Dalloway, knows only her surface, and that imperfectly. One feels, and one's grounds would have to be given at great length and then might not be convincing, for they are purely intuitive, one feels that Mrs. Dalloway must have been quite another woman from the woman Mrs. Woolf describes; some woman much less Mrs. Woolf; one feels, too, that her house was different; one feels, most of all, that Mrs. Woolf does not feel London as it really is, and that many of the book's characters are drawn in arbitrarily. The most successful character is the "poor lunatic," and that, it cannot be accidental, is the most easy to portray. Such a brief condemnation is, perhaps, unfair. One can only hope that the opportunity to explain oneself more at length will arise some day.

Now, as to Mr. Garnett. It may seem curious, but Mr. Garnett is generally rated more highly in France than Mr. Joyce. The latter has an ardent champion in M. Valéry Larbaud and Joyce's own inspiration of method is, as he has admitted, taken from a French novel published originally in 1888 (the title escapes me at the moment), but the body of reviewers regarded "The Portrait of the Artist," when it appeared in Paris in translation a couple of years ago, as rather "provincial." Whereas "Lady Into Fox" of Mr. Garnett was hailed as a perfect little work of art. It is easy to see how Mr. Garnett's books appeal to the French. They have an unmistakable eighteenth century savor. But, although in "A Man in the Zoo" Mr. Garnett showed a deeply stirring insight into the mutually inflicted tortures of love, his is a somewhat sterile art, by which I mean that it leads nowhere. He must either repeat himself *ad nauseam*, or find an entirely different method.

So, upon due reflection, out of M. Maurois's quartet, I would retain only a pair, E. M. Forster and Aldous Huxley. To many, no doubt, the choice of Huxley as the most promising novelist in England today will seem at least puzzling. His output is, as he would say, prodigious. Short stories, travel journalism, and travel itself would appear to take up all his time, so that his novels have to be written, like the serials of that phantom woman novelist of "Limbo," in his sleep. And much in his fiction is mere caricature or just "clever." Further, it might be argued that, highly as his technique and logic are considered in France, his philosophy is so desperate that he can only be termed decadent. But recall the conclusion of "Those Barren Leaves," when the hero goes up into the mountain to reflect upon life and seek his salvation. "John Franklin" (in the *New Statesman*), in unquestionably the best review of that novel when it appeared, hoped that Mr. Huxley would follow his hero's example and go into meditation before writing another novel, adding that if he did, it might be a notable one. To some extent Mr. Huxley has followed that advice. He has been to India, and while his journalism has been as prolific as ever, we are still waiting for his next novel. It

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