

Foreign Literature

"Poetocracy"

NORWEGISCHE LITERATUR. By HERALD BEYER. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1927.

Reviewed by ALLEN W. PORTERFIELD

THERE may be series of books other than the Jedermanns Buecherlein, to which this volume belongs, that contain even more correlated information than is found in the volume before us, but if so, it has never been the writer's fortune to find them. Literary historians such as Henrik Jaeger, Carl Naerup, Kristian Elster, Francis Bull, and Frederik Paasche have all told the story of Norwegian literature, but Elster was the only one who could do it in two volumes while the others demanded four and even five. Beyer has covered the subject in 124 pages. He has left no major theme untouched from the time when Norwegian literature consisted of what the Vikings scratched on rocks to the present when, in his own language, "from the extreme North to the extreme South every valley has its poet."

How did he do it? First by happy use of the outline method through which it becomes possible to give the history of even the world in one book; and then by such condensation as becomes possible where there is studied familiarity with the theme. Johan Bojer, for example, is disposed of in nine words; we are merely told that of the

contemporary narrators he is not the most significant but the best known outside of Norway.

The book, however, is not excessively sketchy. Written for the reader who wishes to get his bearings, it leads up gradually to the age of Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), whom the Danes now try to claim but of whom Beyer says: "He never did take root in Denmark and was loved by but very few of them." After Holberg, it is rather straight going: there was first the national awakening, then the period of Wergeland and Welhaven, after whom came Ibsen and Björnson—and after them that mighty line now as familiar, in translation, to Broadway as to Karl Johan Gade in Oslo.

Every page, every paragraph, of the book is interesting, but the sum-total of its interest lies in the fact that it is a record of sincerity. That is the keynote to Norwegian literature. The Norwegian historian, Ernst Sars, once coined the word "Poetocracy." He claimed that it was the only term that fully expressed the strength and power of Norway's writers. He believed, and rightly so, that what Norway is she owes to her poets. They knew what they wanted and meant what they said. That old *franc tireur*, Henrik Ibsen, was not trying to be jocose when he exclaimed "Be Yourself!" And he did this fully seventy years before that wholesome admonition became slang in the United States.

Professor Beyer has written a great little book. It contains the same type of appended illustrations that always go with the Jedermann series.

A Prize Novel

CENTRO DE LAS ALMAS. By ANTONIO PORRAS.

Reviewed by WILLIS KNAPP JONES
Miami University

THE Fastenrath Prize, awarded yearly by the Spanish Academy, while not the equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize of our country, is not to be despised, and certainly has never been refused. From its inception in 1909, it has been awarded to such people as Fernandez Shaw, Concha Espina, Ricardo Leon, Arturo Reyes, and F. Camba.

In considering prize winners, Spanish literature is divided into five classifications—poetry, novel, history, drama, and literary criticism—and each year the prize is devoted to the best book submitted for consideration in one of the five classes. Hence, when the novel "Centro de las Almas," by Antonio Porras Marquez, was awarded the two thousand pesetas prize it meant that, of the novels submitted to the Academy from among those published in Spain in the last five years, this was considered the best. As usual, the award turned attention to the winner and the books by Sr. Porras were promptly at a premium. Some of them are being reprinted. One, at least, the author wishes forgotten.

Not for an American movie audience is Señor Porras's prizewinning story, in which the hero is killed and the heroine takes the veil. The sense of dramatic foreboding, the heavy pall, is distinctly felt from the instant the story begins to grip the reader. The work is closely woven. Gonzalo Albar, an esthetic sort of person whom we see wrapped in an oriental gown leafing over richly bound books, is in love with Maria Luisa, future countess of Belazor. While hunting in the Sierra Morena he comes upon a bucolic scene where two youngsters, Luis and Aurora, daughter of a poor peasant, are diverting themselves. He witnesses the dawning of love and breaks in upon it when it threatens to become passion. Thenceforth he takes the youngsters under his protection. Learning that Aurora's father is about to lose his farm, Gonzalo borrows 15,000 pesetas from Peleche, the grasping newlyrich who is trying to drive the peasant from his rich farm, and outwits that money grubber by buying it, first planning to present it to Aurora. Manolito, Peleche's son, is Gonzalo's rival for Maria Luisa's affection, and Peleche, with double reason to hate the dreamer, raises to 615,000 pesetas the note and threatens to ruin the young lover. He also sets Luis upon his benefactor, and Gonzalo is killed on a dark road. The end is gloomy desolation. Pan, the charming old friend of the hero, attempts to get revenge, but luck thwarts him and brings more tragedy.

But the story is only part of the charm of the volume. Pictures of Andalusian life, the rodeo, the rural wedding, dances, typical characters, are portrayed with a sure touch, that one who wants to know about southern Spain cannot afford to miss. There is an unforgettable picture of the country by night, another of the mountains, and everything from the author's touches of philosophy to the speech and action of the most minor character proves the deep-seated affection Sr. Porras has for the region of his birth.

Naturally the novel is not perfect. The weeping men and women—almost as many as in a Victorian novel—do not seem convincing and the villainy of Peleche strikes one as being a bit overdone; but the most obvious defect is the stylistic habit the author has of opening his chapters with conversations that do not set the stage, fail to acquaint the reader with what is happening, and so leave him confused till part way through the chapter. This habit dulled part of the effect for at least one reader—especially for the first few chapters.

But the merits far outweigh the defects. One realizes from reading the book, that here is an author worth watching. The other volumes in the cycle will be eagerly awaited.

Foreign Notes

THE second volume in the series, "Studien zur Geschichte der Wirtschaft und Geisteskultur," has recently appeared from the house of Karl Curtius in Berlin. It is by Frau E. Döring-Hirsch, is entitled "Tod und Jenseits im Spätmittelalter," and is a study of the medieval conception of death and futurity. In the violent age of which she writes, death lurked constantly around the corner; plague, public executions, incessant street brawls, and infant mortality made the prospect of a sudden end to life a matter of course, to be accepted without the shuddering horror with which a later age regards them. Frau Döring-Hirsch is largely concerned with the relation of the church to the deeds of violence and the disasters that too were accepted as unalterable acts of providence, and with the relating of them by the people to their attitude toward the future life. Her book contains much interesting material.

Readers of Norman Douglas who are familiar with Italian would doubtless derive entertainment from the amusing book, "Aria di Capri" (Naples: Casella), in which Edwin Cerio depicts the island and its society today. Signor Cerio has a lively pen, and he describes the celebrities of Capri in animated fashion, weaving into his narrative myth and local color.


The Orell Füssli Verlag of Zurich has inaugurated a series of monographs on Swiss art with a handsome and able volume by Arnold Federmann on Johann Heinrich Füssli, or, as he is better known to Anglo-Saxons, Fuseli. Herr Federmann enters upon a study of this contemporary and friend of Blake whom, as the *London Times Literary Supplement* notes, Reynolds expected to become a second Raphael, and who wrote a defense of Rousseau which some mistook for the work of Smollett, both as painter and writer. Students of art will find much to interest them in his volume.

An unpublished notebook of Dostoevsky's has recently come to light in Russia. The notebook was given by the novelist to the young wife of an officer of the marines who had left the army to devote himself to literature. It dates from 1860, and among other reasons is interesting because it makes evident the fact that Dostoevsky instead of returning from his Siberian exile crushed in spirit came back more intellectually vigorous than he had ever been before. The notebook is now in the possession of the Dostoevsky Museum in Moscow.

"La Fille d'Affaires" (Paris: Flammarion), by J. H. Rosny, sr., shows a French novelist concerned as are his fellows all over the world with the young woman of today. His novel presents a vivid picture of one of the women who are the product of post-war France, and whose attitude and opportunities are so different from those of the preceding generation.

The autobiography of the late Clement Shorter is to be issued for private circulation only. The manuscript has been for some time in the hands of Dr. J. M. Bulloch, and he is preparing a Memoir which will go out only to the more intimate acquaintances of the late editor of the *Sphere*.

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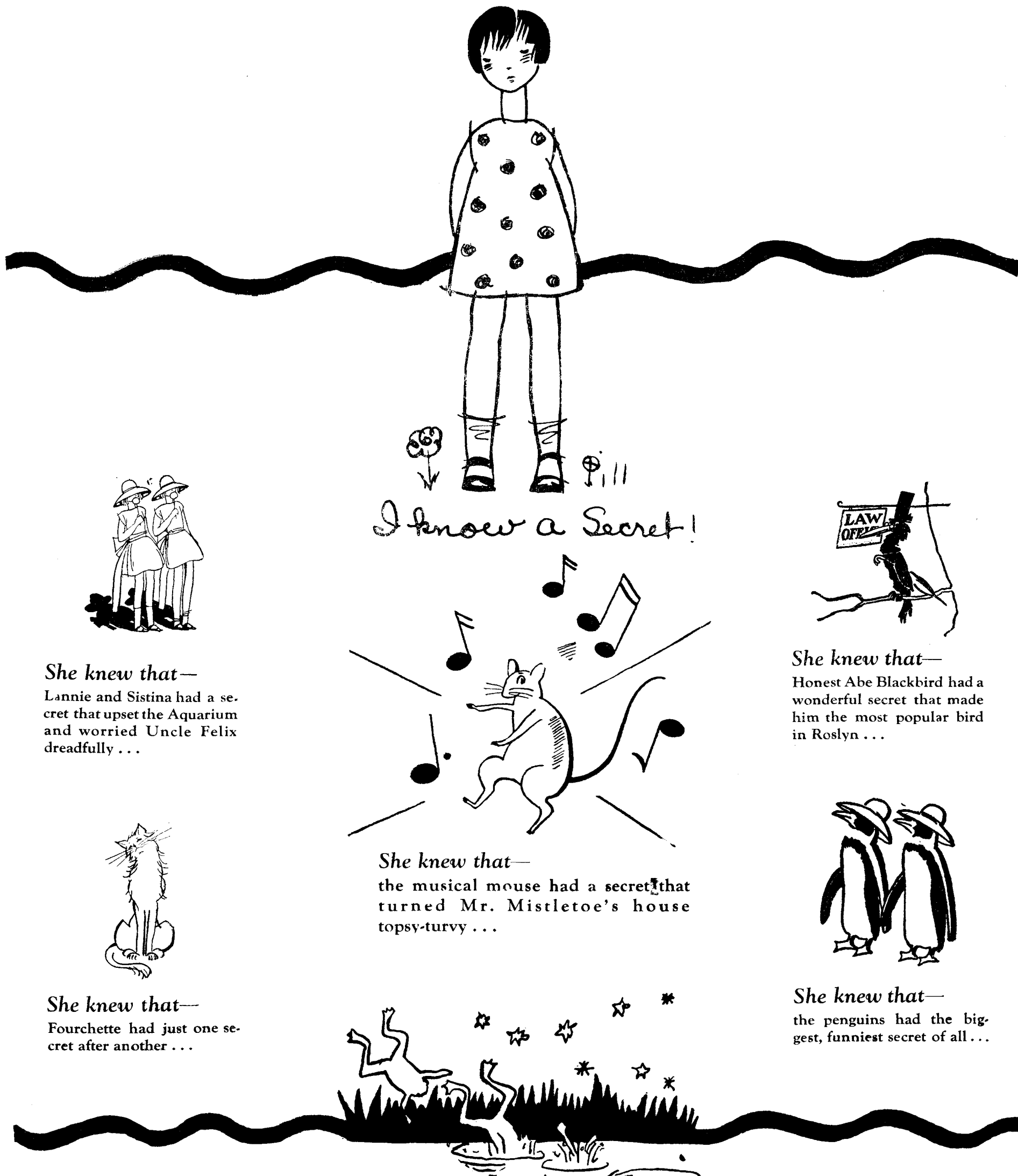
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