

Foreign Literature

From the Austrian Angle

DIE KATASTROPHE: Die Zertrümmerung Oesterreich-Ungarns und das Werden der Nachfolgestaaten. Von EDMUND VON GLAISE-HORSTENAU. Wien: Amalthea Verlag. 1929.

Reviewed by ROBERT DUNLOP

WE confess that we are getting rather tired of war literature. It is mostly such dreary reading. But we must make an exception in the case of the present book. It is decidedly the best we have read on the subject from an Austrian point of view—comprehensive, accurate, well-informed, and as impartial as can reasonably be expected. In fact a book that within moderate limits and with its admirable bibliography fills a distinct gap on our shelf.

As Director of the Austrian War Archives and a former officer Herr von Glaise-Horstenau is able to write on military matters with authority and a full knowledge of the difficulties against which the Austrian General Staff had to contend, owing in

large measure to the overwhelming influence exerted on the course of operations by Germany. The great mistake of the war, as he sees it, and his opinion is confirmed by French military writers, was that, after the collapse of the Serbian army and the alliance with Bulgaria, the Austrians did not push on to Saloniki. Nothing, he urges, could have been more foolish than to allow a defeated enemy the opportunity, with the help of the Allies, to recover its strength when a vigorous offensive would have cleared the Balkan peninsula and opened the way to Constantinople. For this blunder, of which the consequence was the collapse of the Bulgarian front in 1918, he holds Falkenhayn to have been directly responsible. So, too, in regard to Conrad Von Hötzendorf's plan for a concentrated attack on Italy in the autumn of 1916 and again in the spring of 1917, which would probably have knocked Italy out of the war.

As it was in military matters so it was in political. Austrian interests had always to yield to German. It is the misfortune of Germans that they can see things only

from their own standpoint. They were angry with Austria because she would not consent to purchase Italian neutrality by the surrender of South Tyrol; but they would never listen to any suggestion to purchase peace by the restoration of Alsace and Lorraine. They had been so accustomed to view things in the light of Königgrätz and Sedan that they could not conceive of any other solution of the war than a German victory. Even now they won't recognize that in the first instance they are responsible for the fate that has befallen Austria. They forget that without the encouragement they gave her to stand firm, Austria would never have ventured on a war with Russia alone. It would be all over, so Moltke said, in five weeks. And now their historians burn and rend the Hapsburgs as the perpetual curse of Germany. They forget that Austria might have saved herself if she had consented to a separate peace and that she would have been perfectly justified in doing so. For, was it not Bismarck himself who said that "there may come a time when loyalty to one's ally must yield to the necessity of self-preservation"?

That time had come for Austria in 1916 and there is little doubt that, if the Em-

peror, Francis Joseph, had lived a few months longer, he would have agreed to a separate peace. The mischief of the situation was that Charles fell into the hands of Czernin and Tisza and that neither of them would support him wholeheartedly in his endeavor to pursue a distinctly Austrian policy. Austria, there is no question, was sacrificed to gratify German military ambition. The wonder is, as Glaise-Horstenau says, that she was able to hold out so long and that when she fell it was not the sword of Italy that struck her to the ground, but hunger. In what he has to say of the new States that have arisen out of the ruin of the Empire Herr von Glaise-Horstenau only touches the fringe of a great problem. For those, who, like the present writer, hold that the dissolution of the Empire was a great misfortune for Europe and for civilization, the subject is one of fascinating interest and we hope that he will, as he half promised to do, give us the impartial and comprehensive review of the actual state of affairs in the succession States we so much need.

A Flemish Novelist

PIETER BREUGHEL. By FELIX TIMMERMANS. Leipzig: Insel Verlag. 1929.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

THIS well-produced book, with its very characteristic thumbnail illustrations by the author, contains, one would say, the essence of Flanders. M. Timmermans, whose book has been translated into German by Peter Mertens, and thus made accessible to a much wider circle than that which can read it in the original, is a Flemish writer in every sense of the word—not only in race, but in choice of subject and truth to that full-blooded Flemish life he knows and appreciates so well, whether it be of today or of three or four centuries ago. The theme of his novel is the development, from childhood on through manhood, artistic success, and human happiness, to death, of the sixteenth century painter, Pieter Breughel. And in giving us the portrait of the man the writer has painted, with vigor and realism, the age into which he was born and on which, as Mr. R. H. Wilenski not long ago pointed out in his "Introduction to Dutch Art," he provided so telling a commentary.

Pieter Breughel was born in very humble conditions, but his artistic talents were soon recognized and he eventually was taken into the studio and the household of Coecke, a pageant-painter, representative of those tendencies in Flemish art which—again one may refer to Mr. Wilenski's book—so importantly differentiated the art of Flanders from its geographical near neighbor. The various love-affairs in which Pieter was involved before he married his master's daughter, the drinking-bouts, a matter of competition between Antwerp and Brussels, in which he took part, the life of the Flemish village, with its combination of coarse humor, fleshliness, and deep genuine piety—Roman Catholic piety, of course—all these are admirably rendered by M. Timmermans. He has also not neglected the important event of Breughel's artistic career, his visit to Italy, the impression on his mind and art of the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci in Milan, of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" and Raphael's Stanze, of the masterpieces of Titian. But most of this section of the biography is rendered indirectly; the writer's direct method of presentation is used far more with the native environment of the artist, and in particular of the spiritual and political condition of his time. Round the inn's fireside where Pieter foregathered with his companions there was constant talk of the great world beyond,

of the Emperor Charles and his adventures, both gay and sad, of wars and eruptions, of pestilence, of Luther and Calvin, of heretics, torturings, executions, and wonders, of good and evil Popes, of famine and drought, of Father Ignatius Loyola, comets, murder, new saints. It was an age of angels and devils. And Pieter listened to it all, with rapt attention. He sat with the men at the massive beer-tables or in the circle by the roaring fire and learnt how evil, terrible, and unbearable the world was.

For Flanders the world was, of course, made all the more intolerable by the Spanish occupation, and Pieter used to reflect much on this. He often talked of it with a patriotic Flemish friar, and obtained a lively impression of the horrors committed by the Spanish soldiery—horrors which, thinly disguised or not disguised at all, he transferred to canvas. For the friar, as for himself, the struggle raised a conflict between his religion and his love of country. Pieter, declining to choose between things so equally essential to him, dropped all interest in politics, at the end ordering the destruction of some of his bitterest pictures, for fear of the trouble they might bring on his wife.

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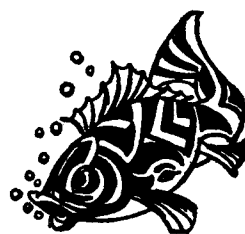
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