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Literature Abroad

FICHE BLIAN A' FAS. By Maurice O'Sullivan. Dublin, Ireland: The Talbot Press. 1933.

Reviewed by MICEAL O'KIERSEY

WHILE Gaelic scholars and writers in Dublin were working under the supervision of a government commission, turning out an ungainly mass of dry text-books and unappetizing translations from the works of foreign authors, Gaelic speakers and those who aimed to become Gaelic speakers found themselves starved for creative literature and were obliged to turn for entertainment and intellectual stimulation to other languages. But while the blue pencils up in Dublin were furiously stabbing at all creative tendencies, a young Gaelic speaker, Maurice O'Sullivan by name, hiding in the obscurity of a policeman's uniform in Connemara, was setting down in his native tongue the story of the first twenty years of his life. His book, published in Gaelic under the title "Fiche Blian A' Fas," has already been brought out in an English edition in London, and is to be issued in America soon under the name "Twenty Years Agrowing" by the Viking Press.

Though written in the first person "Fiche Blian A' Fas" is not, strictly speaking, a biographical novel for the author reveals but little of himself. In a simple narration of the events of twenty years O'Sullivan paints a delightful picture of life among the Gaelic-speaking folk on the Blaskets, a small group of islands off the coast of Kerry. He is a born storyteller, with no pretensions to scholarship, and his power lies in his exquisitely free use of the vernacular. Here is no suggestion of any laboring after style or structure and the result falls little short of the perfection of both. It is a book compellingly reminiscent of Peadar O'Donnell's "Islanders."

One wonders how such a book as "Fiche Blian A' Fas" has weathered the hazards of translation. The Gaelic vernacular holds a unique beauty, suggestive of the flow of a mighty river. It is a something that may not be mastered by a timid soul for its candor and virility of expression are startling to a mind nurtured in the conventions and associations of the English-speaking world. In an extraordinarily wealthy vocabulary it combines subtlety and directness to a degree that would furnish no mean inspiration to either Rabelais or Shakespeare. Somebody expressed it very well in a recent article—"The Gaelic speaker has no use for words that come out of the side of the mouth." The simple beauty of the book might be preserved, though much of its subtlety must be lost, in the dialect used by Lady Gregory and brought to perfection by Synge. The dialect represents Irish ideas inadequately clothed in English words and, though its range is limited, its charm is undeniable. Perhaps the most obvious difficulty that confronts the translator is the limitation of vocabulary imposed on him, for the vocabulary of the average English-speaking Irishman is little more than one third that of the average Gaelic speaker.

"Fiche Blian A' Fas" will lead readers the world over to the portals of Tir na nóg. But it is from the Irish viewpoint that the book is of paramount importance; for it steps out ahead of the school of Anglo-Irish writers, incidentally issuing a challenge to the recently formed Academy of Irish Letters, the very existence of which is paradoxical. Maurice O'Sullivan takes his place as a storyteller beside Seamus O'Grianna and the late Padraig O'Conaire, and his work cannot but prove a stimulus to the growth of a new Gaelic literature.

Light on Hitlerism

DIE STADT. By Ernst von Salomon. Berlin: E. Rowohlt. 1933.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

ANY dominance of the National Socialist idea in Germany may abolish, or at least obscure and discredit, certain tendencies in contemporary German literature, and it is an interesting question what will take the vacant place. Will National Socialism produce any imaginative literature; will it, instead of the realism, naturalism, expressionism and radicalism which it hates, inspire any new forms of writing, or give an impetus to those writers, already a by no means negligible company before National So-

cialism attained its triumph, who have been bringing a new spirit into German fiction, poetry and drama? The question cannot be answered yet and it would lead too far to examine all the possibilities, but certainly no consideration of the literary side of National Socialism can leave Ernst von Salomon out of account.

Two years ago, in his "Die Geächteten," of which an English version entitled "The Outlaws" was published, Salomon gave a forceful and vivid first hand picture of the nationalist revolutionary movement. Out of this reaction against internationalism, constitutionalism, and parliamentary democracy, out of this kind of freebooters' campaigning on the Eastern frontiers of Germany, came some of the inspiration which Hitler was to gather up and concentrate in the National Socialist Workers' Party. Herr von Salomon's book was a valuable illustration to a page of German post-war history.

Now he has given us another, not less memorable or important. It may be read as a continuation of "Die Geächteten," for, in the person of its hero, called Ive, it carries on the revelation of the political mind of Young Germany from more or less the point where the earlier book laid it down, and it stops with the death of Ive, killed in a street-battle by the bullets of one of the Government's armed police. That is some time before Herr Hitler succeeded to the Chancellorship, but the preliminaries to that important event are excellently demonstrated here. In fact, in this story—if story it can, strictly, be called—lies the elucidation of much that, to the outsider, may be incomprehensible in the change of German outlook during the past six or eight months.

We have questioned the term "story" as applied to Herr von Salomon's book because the narrative, which is nothing more than an account of the experiences and reflections of Ive and his friends, is all but submerged by the philosophical debates, the political polemic of the various characters to whom the writer introduces his readers. Ive begins by associating himself with the peasant-movement in Schleswig. This movement, which is born of the farmers' despair, is against the "town"; the politicians of the city have been unable to do anything to help the peasant out of the morass into which debts and falling prices have plunged him. A peasant revolution is planned. Its inspiration is distinctly communist, but it is also intensely nationalist; it has that antipathy to the bourgeois state consecrated in the Weimar Constitution which brought the extremes of Left and Right together. Eventually Ive comes to the city; he enters the gates of that old enemy, and within them he will work for the triumph of the revolutionary peasant-idea which he has championed in the provinces. He sets to work with his abundant youthful energy to advocate his cause, both in the press and to those people with whom he now makes contact.

In all this discussion, it should be emphasized, it is the national interest that is placed first by most of the characters. For the principles of Marxism which, it appears, are really those held by the bourgeois Social Democrats against whom both Communists and National Socialists have sworn undying hatred, there seems to be little respect. Much of the political sympathy of this book rests on a keen sense of economic disaster, combined with a realization of the helplessness of the government, but with little consideration of economic doctrine or practice. In fact, although Herr von Salomon's characters talk a great deal and often with great interest, on all kinds of fascinating political problems—Church and State, Federalism versus Centralism, and the like—their hopes and plans seem to owe little to the old kind of party-allegiance. They look for the coming of that "Drittes Reich"—that third Empire in which the proletarian triumph shall be combined with the supreme attainment of the national and racial aspirations of Germanism—and the precise means of reaching it are never definitely stated. This is not a fault; it makes all the more vivid to our understanding the effervescence of German nationalist youth in the past four or five years. The ordinary reader of German fiction would probably not be grateful to be recommended to study this book, for, in spite of its exciting incidents, it is discursive to the point of boredom. But no student of recent German politics should fail to read it.



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