

The World of Foreign Books

Books in Germany

A Survey by LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

WITH the mark at half a cent, the future dark enough, the cultivated middle classes impoverished more and more, the Germans are finding their old refuge—a refuge they have always cultivated in periods of national defeat and political impotence—the life of the mind. Paper is exceedingly hard to get and excessively dear. A distinguished critic writes me that he cannot send me copies of his books. They are out of print. The use of paper can be risked only for books sure to sell 20,000 copies. Suppose our publishers were similarly limited. It is easy to imagine what, by and large, our new reading matter would be like!

What are the Germans using their paper for? One Berlin publisher announces a new edition in six volumes of the complete works of Poe. Not only a new edition but a new translation. There is an older one. But the art of translation has progressed. Hence this venture. Another publisher announces a magnificent new edition in two large volumes of the collected writings of Walt Whitman. "In these books," the translator declares, "the nascent German democracy can find a source of cosmic and political inspiration." The set sells at 170 marks. The publisher—it is Fischer of Berlin, and so his figures may be trusted—quietly declares that four editions were sold before publication. It is the same with new editions of Stendhal, Strindberg, Dostoevski, Tolstoi, Dante.

Dehmel and Mann.

Two native German books stand out at this moment. Neither is a novel. Both will have the widest circulation. For one is the legacy, the other the latest work, of a great man. These books are "The Letters of Richard Dehmel" and "Speech and Answer," by Thomas Mann. If it had not been for the war, which naturally interrupted the spread of their international reputation, American lovers of poetry would be better acquainted with Dehmel than they are with Verhaeren or Paul Fort; they would be, as they soon will be, reading Mann's "Buddenbrooks" and his shorter stories as they are reading Ibanex and Hamsun.

Dehmel's letters are a document and a book of the first order. They present the living image of an intense, infinitely natural personality and of a thinker who was unafraid. They are brimful of human charm as well as a confession of extraordinary frankness and import on all the major phenomena of modern life. Thomas Mann has temporarily abandoned fiction for the sake of helping and counseling the nation in its years of hardship. He is a stylist of the rank of Conrad. But his style is clearer, simpler and more resonant. It is as crystalline as his mind. Always a sound liberal, he is now speaking to his native democracy in words that every other democracy of the world may well heed. The first rate men transcend nationality. And Thomas Mann is an artist and a personality of the first order.

Philosophy and Sex.

We have heard faintly of Eduard von Keyserling and his "Traveling Diary of a Philosopher," a fascinating book of observation, confession, social philosophy and metaphysics that took the public by storm. Keyserling is of the opinion that hard, clear, honest, consecrated thinking can save the world and the soul. Hence he has established a "free school for philosophy." There are no entrance requirements to this school

of thought, which is also a school of spiritual clarification. Workingmen attend it as well as professors from the universities. The school has issued, under the editorship of its founder, its first collection of writings, "The Path of Perfection." And this volume is being widely read side by side with Frau Marie Enckendorff's "Reality and Legality in the Life of Sex" and new editions of Hans Blüher's famous "The Function of the Erotic in Human Society." I place these extraordinarily different books side by side in order to point out what I hope and believe will be in the future the plane on which the German and the American minds must meet—the plane of vital, practical philosophy which seeks to face the truth in order to build a better world.

Drama and Verse.

When it comes to imaginative literature there is no doubt that the drama and lyrical poetry lead fiction in Germany to-day. There is, for instance, Franz Werfel. He is a little over 30 and already one of the chief lyrical and philosophical poets in Europe. His verse is as realistic as Massfield's and as soaring as Francis Thompson's, with all the ideas of the future throbbing in it. Recently Werfel has turned to the drama—to a new kind of poetical and even lyrical drama which can actually be played and is played in the theater. His "Mirror Man" and "The Song of Pan" are imaginative without being remote and poetical, without ceasing to be intensely realistic. How is that union possible? students of English poetry will ask. The answer is: By virtue of the tradition established by "Faust." Behind the latest radical in German literature stands the shadow of Goethe, the cosmic radical whose example we may all, if we work and think hard enough, reach by and by.

Expressionism in the Drama.

I haven't spoken of expressionism in the drama. Every one has been doing that of late. And you can read about it in an admirable American book by Kenneth Macgowan. But the latest man, the man of the moment, in the expressionistic drama is Ernst Toller, whose "Crowd"—"Masse Mensch"—is now being played in Berlin. Here the grimy modern worker finds a new, strange expression which is, again, intensely realistic as well as intensely poetical. There are choruses which remind you of the tragedy of the Greeks and an exactness of psychology that reminds you of the plays of Galsworthy or the novels of Dreiser. Here is, if anywhere in the world to-day, a new art form. That is the rarest of all things. It cannot, perhaps, be transferred to the American stage to-day. We should create and evolve our own. But this new form will not be without its fructifying influence on us.

Fiction.

In fiction the very latest man is undoubtedly Josef Ponten. His work has been appearing in the "Neue Rundschau," still the best literary periodical in Germany, as well as in book form. Ponten, like the older masters of German fiction, cultivates the "novelle," the story of from 8,000 to 20,000 words, the form familiarized to us by Henry James. He writes of simple souls. His style is easy and transparent, and there is little direct analysis of any sort. Yet his merit lies in the profoundness of the manner in which he exhausts his subjects. His saturation with them is complete, and from his quiet narratives arise visions of man and of the world that tug at the nerves of the reader and open the doors of the heart.

Books of the Week

Continued from Preceding Page.

the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead. Dorrance & Co.

ST. JUSTIN THE MARTYR—By C. C. Martindale, S. J. In the "Catholic Thought and Thinkers" series. P. J. Kenedy & Sons.

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM—By Maurice Wilkinson. Another in the above mentioned series. P. J. Kenedy & Sons.

City Government.

HANDBOOK OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT—By Charles M. Fassett. Statement of the various forms of city government and the best methods of administration. Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

ASSETS OF THE IDEAL CITY—By Charles M. Fassett. A description of the important institutions, activities and undertakings which pertain to modern life in cities. Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Miscellaneous.

AN EVERYDAY CAKE BOOK—By Mrs. G. Paul in association with Mrs. Lloyd George and others. A cake recipe for every day of the year. Moffat, Yard & Co.

REAL ESTATE BUSINESS AS A PROFESSION—By John B. Spiker and Paul Gregory Cloud. Intended as a guide for the real estate broker, the student who desires to enter the business as a profession and the public at large. Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Company.

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