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LITERARY PAGE

Edited by Dr. PAUL LANG.

All letters containing criticisms, suggestions, questions, &c., with regard to this page should be addressed to the "Literary Editor."

NEW BOOKS OF FICTION.

The Vaudois author *C. F. Ramuz* is even now beginning to conquer the difficult town of Paris. His latest book, *"La Séparation des Races,"* has been brought out by a Paris publisher (Editons du Monde Nouveau) and seems to make its way in quite a satisfactory manner. This is indeed glorious news, for Ramuz, though he has lived in Paris more than once, has never really compromised with France in the way that Cherbouliez or Dumur have done. Sturdily he has pursued his arduous path to write as nothing but a Vaudois, and to conquer the world as a Vaudois. One will remember that his last books all showed a similar character, one markedly different from his earlier books. Whereas he started as a naturalist of the most outspoken character, he later on—from "La Règne de l'esprit malin" onwards—worked along a certain mystical path. In his early days he used to pick out two or three clear-cut persons and show us the simple events of their life. Later on he wanted to give us a picture of the fall, or at least the decline, of a whole village, of a whole country, of the whole of mankind. To depict this from a number of points of view, he had to mobilise dozens, hundreds of persons of which, of course, we could not catch more than a glimpse. Thus his tales, though they have gained in breadth and width of composition, have lost in intensity. His characters become some sort of marionettes. But you felt very acutely something else. You felt the grip of inescapable Fate, mightier than any human force and to be endured without any ray of hope. A fatalistic, pessimistic smell evaporates from Ramuz's latest books which we recently labelled apocryphal. "Terre du Ciel" and "Présence de la Mort" represent in their way a climax. The writer *had* to come back from the Absolute, and he did so. He already did so in "Salutation paysanne" and in "Le Chant du Rhône," two books preceding the one which I have to review to-day.

"La Séparation des Races," though the title indicates a general theme, is nevertheless in its main a novel dealing with the love and hatred of two human beings. Firmin, a Valaisan, and She —Ramuz only calls her "Elle"; I am sorry she has no Christian name—is a girl from the Bernese Oberland. The mountains separate the races. This separation must be respected, else trouble is bound to come. Thus one could formulate the "leitmotiv" of the book. Firmin falls in love with the blonde girl, whom he has seen on the top of the pass. One day he captures her and brings his unconcious prey down into the southern valley. How gradually he tries to win her love and thinks at last he has done so, but how she conspires against him through the medium of a pedlar, with a view to escape, these are the contents of the book in a nutshell. At the end, when Firmin has already agreed to go over to her people and marry her there, her Bernese liberators, led by her fiancé, reach the village. Fire breaks out, thanks to a feeble-minded boy whom She had promised to follow if he would blindly do what she told him, and while the villagers run to the burning cottage, her liberators hang Firmin, whom, by her caresses, she prevented from getting suspicious. From this short *resumé* it would appear that the tale is one of cruelty. Yet the astonishing events, which form the end of the tale, are concentrated into a very few lines. The bulk of the book has a peaceful, even, at times, tiresome character. The negative aspect of Ramuz's style seems to us to be more pronounced in this book than in all those before. The characteristics of the people he depicts here warrant, of course, slow language to a degree. Still, their feelings can hardly be of such an utter simplicity as Ramuz will have us believe.

One grants that, in a sense, this book combines his earlier and his later method. It is at the same time a story of two lovers and also the story of two races. Apart from this, some considerations, not of a purely æsthetical kind, suggest themselves so strongly that we do not think they should be subdued. This girl of the tall and fair-haired race is simply repulsive. Though she has been wronged —but Firmin never touched her; there is no question of her having been violated—this cannot excuse her double game entirely. With the cunning of a witch she induces the poor Valaisian boy to believe in a love which she, as the end shows, clearly never felt at all. Her revenge is inhuman, is of a nature which makes this girl for us the prototype of the "blonde beast" of Nietzsche's description. If we only take the æsthetic point of view, Ramuz has, of course, every right to invent as many monsters as he likes. Yet it does not please us, from the Swiss point of view, that the gifted Vaudois writer seems to have made all the worst prejudices of French nationalist writers against the German race his own. It is certainly symptomatic that just this book, of all Ramuz's books, should have a great success in Paris. His gist is frankly hostile to everything not meridional, but then, we remember that Ramuz wrote before—in the story of "Samuel Belet—of the cunning Bernese servant who got the better of a simple-minded Vaudois. We regret the harm which this turn of the great writer's mind might cause to the understanding of the two races out of which the Swiss nation is built up. We have in the past praised often enough the Vaudois nationalism, as shown in the contemporary literature of this powerful canton. It cannot be but useful that some of its drawbacks should once be put into evidence.

Ramuz has written some of the best, if not all the best, short stories of French-speaking Switzerland. In German-speaking Switzerland the typical short-story writer is *J. Bosshart*, the veteran writer, who, one remembers, gained the Gottfried Keller Prize last year. His new collection, *"Neben der Heerstrasse"* (Grethlein & Co., Zurich), again emphasizes his particular gift for this form of fiction, which is rapidly progressing on the Continent, too. The six tales are nearly all of a sad atmosphere. They deal with things and men who are going downwards. Bosshart's sympathy and realm of fiction is infinitely wider than that of Ramuz. He speaks with the same intimacy and knowledge of peasants and of townspeople, of the lower middle and the upper middle classes. One of the six tales conjures up again the time of unrest as it was felt during the last years of the War in Zurich. The "Friedensapostel" brings home to us the person of that well-known agitator Daetwyler. Another story tells about two old people, the possessors of a farm on the outskirts of Zurich. They fight a hopeless and desperate struggle against the expanding town, which, like an octopus, swallows up all the land around. There is hardly a decrease in Bosshart's technique to be noticed. A sign of fatigue might be that now and then he chooses to quicken events by interpolating a paragraph in indirect dialogue. When compared with the remainder of the book, those passages sometimes look pale and unconvincing (in "Der Niedergang," for instance). A number of woodcuts are interspersed throughout the book. They are of a highly expressionistic character and do not fit well, it must be said, with the rather conservative nature of the milieus described.

I will finally say a word on the book, *"Gilles der Weichherzige,"* by *Leo von Meyenburg*, which has also been brought out by Grethlein & Co., Zurich. Whenever you read Bosshart, you feel at once that you are in the presence of a powerful, but in no way a brilliant personality. Bosshart, is the super-teacher. Through the writer you now and then detect the teacher. Leo von Meyenburg is quite another type of man. He is probably the purest type of the æsthete that Swiss letters have hitherto produced. An æsthete is, above all, a human being that does not bother about things in which the rest of mankind is interested. He knows but a very few and highly sophisticated pleasures. Most things in life cause him infinite pain, for his tastes are such as to be very rarely gratified. It is especially hard for an æsthete to be born without money, for never imagine that one can *become* an æsthete, one is either born one or one is not. Of course, there are quite a number of millionaires' sons in and round Zurich nowadays who play at being æsthetes. It is highly amusing to watch their exertions at close quarters. And it does not take very much time, as a rule, to pierce through the slight epidermis of their affected æstheticism to their solid every-day Helvetic constitution. Now, Mr. von Meyenburg is a born æsthete. That means that he needs is unhappy on the Helvetic soil. Paris is the only atmosphere adequate for him, the Montmartre the only place which he does not seem to abhor. He presents us to-day with a fantastic story of three characters which are familiar to those who know what the "Comedia dell'Arte" is. Gilles, the white pierrot whom Watteau so often painted, Harlekin and Mezzetin are the three figures of his book. Gilles is the idealist, Harlekin the realist, and Mezzetin the sceptic. To watch how these three types react in three different ways to the simple events which form the story causes delight and sometimes a gentle surprise. It is a philosophic book as much as a poetic one, written in a German which has all the qualities of French. Many of us have, just as the writer of this book, idealistic, realistic and sceptical tendencies in us. It is likely, though, that in us they are not so often at loggerheads as they must have been in the one who elevated them into the realm of poetry, irony and philosophy and turned them into types which one does not easily forget.

UNSER VOLKSHEER.

Die Diskussion über Notwendigkeit oder Ueberflüssigkeit unserer Armee geht weiter. Da ist es nicht ohne Wert, dass man hin und wieder sich die Tatsachen vergegenwärtigt. Der schönen Monographie "Unser Volksheer" (Grethlein & Co., Zürich), die wir das letztemal besprachen, entnehmen wir folgende Abschnitte:

Aus "Volk und Heer," von Oberstkorpskommandant Wildbolz.

"Man hört in unserm Lande oft die bange Frage stellen: Ob ein Militärheer überhaupt kriegstüchtig sein könne und ob unsere Kräfte für unsere Landesverteidigung überhaupt ausreichen. Es mag vermessen sein, Dinge von solcher Bedeutung in der Form eines solchen Aufsatzes behandeln zu wollen. Doch ich wage es, denn ich meine, die Popularisierung der Grundlagen unseres Wehrwesens, die Klärung der Begriffe durch recht einfach gehaltene Darlegungen sei ein Gebot der Zeit.

"Die Sachlage in Europa ist noch viel zu verworren, und alles ist noch zu sehr in Bewegung, als dass es möglich wäre zu sagen, welche Bedrohung uns in den nächsten Jahren oder Jahrzehnten erstehen könnte. . . .

"So scheinen denn auch Behörden und Volk die unabwendbare Notwendigkeit erkannt zu haben, unsere Wehrkraft wenigstens auf der bisherigen Höhe zu halten und vor allem auf uns selbst und nicht auf fremde Hilfe zu zählen. Wahrscheinlich wird kaum je einer unserer mächtigen Nachbarn sich mit seinem ganzen Heer auf uns stürzen können, wir werden es meist nur mit Teilkräften, mit Bruchteilen zu tun bekommen. Denn eine Grossmacht, die uns mit Krieg überziehen will, wird sehr grosse Kräfte im eigenen Lande bereithalten müssen, um Gefahren, die aus solcher Unternehmung an andern Fronten entspringen müssten, entgegentreten zu können. Diese Bedeutung trat im Weltkriege wiederholt in grellstes Licht, und zweifellos hat die Sicherung dieser Verbindungen durch unsere neutrale und aktionsbereite Wehrkraft sehr dazu beigetragen, Zentraleuropa vor weiterer Ausdehnung des Kriegstheaters und der damit verbundenen Verwüstung zu schützen.

"Grosse Heere bedürfen gewaltiger Breitenräume mit zahlreichen und guten Kommunikationen und Hilfsmitteln. Unser Land bietet — seiner Ausdehnung und Gestaltung wegn — der grossen militärischen Operation nur wenig Raum. Diese Verhältnisse bestimmen Stärke und Zusammensetzung der für eine Operation durch die Schweiz in Frage kommenden Truppenmacht. Daraus ergibt sich auch die Stärke der für unsere Landesverteidigung benötigten Truppen.

"Solche Rechnung berechtigt zur Annahme, dass unter nicht allzu ungünstigen Umständen unsere Wehrkraft, bei äusserster Anspannung aller noch wehrfähigen Altersklassen, der gestellten Aufgabe genügen dürfte, wenigstens so lange, bis unser Widerstand eine Entlastung des gegen uns ins Werk gesetzten Druckes herbeigeführt haben würde. Hierbei fallen die Schwierigkeiten, welche unser Gelände dem Eindringling bereitet, und die Unterstützung, welche es uns zu bieten vermag, schwer in Betracht. . . .

"Es sind endlich Stimmen laut geworden, welche unter Hinweis auf die furchtbare Entwicklung der Kriegsaviatik und der chemischen Kriegsindustrie behaupten, all unsere Verteidigungsmassnahmen könnten ja gleich in erster Stunde durch ganz gross angelegte feindliche Raids zunichte gemacht werden. Solche Angriffe würden sich gegen unsere Mobilmachungsplätze mit ihren grossen Ansammlungen von Menschen, Tieren und Geräten, gegen unsere Magazine, Bahnhöfe, Kunstbauten der Verkehrsanstalten mit Bomben, Gas und Gift richten.

"So etwas mag technisch möglich sein, bedarf allerdings einer im Frieden sehr weit getriebenen Vorbereitung. *Aber derartigen Möglichkeiten sei eine andere Macht gegenübergestellt!* Welcher Staat, der noch irgendwelchen Anspruch auf Menschentum, auf Zivilisation (vom Christentum gar nicht zu sprechen) erhebt, dürfte es wagen, einen derartigen scheusslichen Angriff, dem gleich in erster Stunde auch Tausende friedlicher Bürger, Frauen, Kinder zum Opfer fallen müssten, gegen unser Land zu richten, gegen die neutrale Schweiz, welche kein Mensch auf Erden schlimmer Absichten gegen irgend einen Nachbar zeihen kann! Mit solch teuflischem, gegen Neutrale gerichteten Unternehmen darf kein noch so rücksichtsloser Feldherr seine Kriegsaktion beginnen, *denn solchen Fluch kann er nicht auf sein Volk und Heer laden.*

"Wie hat der Bruch der belgischen Neutralität der Sache Deutschlands geschadet! Wie viel schlimmer wäre Derartiges!

"Und wir Schweizer wollen hoffen, dass solche auch in kleinerem Masstabe unternommene Versuche in unserm Land die gleiche Wirkung ausüben würden wie in England, wo der erste Zeppelin-Bomben-Angriff auf London gleichen Tages hunderttausend Mann dem englischen Freiwilligenheere zuführte, statt, wie erhofft, lähmend das englische Volk zu treffen.

"Endlich bieten sich Möglichkeiten, die Ansammlungen zu vermeiden, welche solchen Bombenangriffen so "prächtigen" Erfolg versprechen. Wir brauchen also auch vor solcher Gefahr nicht in die Knie zu sinken und müssen auch ihr tapfer ins Auge sehen.

"Die geschichtliche Entwicklung unseres kleinen, im Herzen Europas gelegnen Landes hat uns eigne Wege, aber doch eigentlich stets dem gleichen hohen Ziele zugeführt. Diese Entwicklung legt uns Pflichten auf, die für die ganze Welt Bedeutung haben. Nur wenn wir alles daran setzen, ihnen zu genügen, uns unserer Freiheit wirklich würdig zu erweisen, verschaffen wir uns Achtung und sind wir der Gnade würdig, welche die Vorsehung unserm Lande zuteil werden liess."