

*The Will to Culture*

ON February 22, Aschehoug of Christiania published "Norges Statskalender for Aaret 1924" (The Year Book of Norway for 1924), edited by J. H. Beer. There lies before me "The Norway Year Book, 1924", edited by S. C. Hammer, and published by Sverre Mortensen of Christiania. In other words Norway, with a population just equal to that of Virginia, sees fit to indulge in two totally different books on the same theme. The latter volume is an interesting case of the crisscrossing that is becoming so prominent in international relations. France alone lags behind. The Frenchmen never have translated, and they are not doing it now. Word went out from Paris recently that George Brandes's "Voltaire", 1,187 pages, and his "Main Currents", six volumes, are to be done into French. I do not believe it. The French do not translate. They brought out a translation several months ago of the correspondence between Goethe and Schiller, and acted as though this were something quite unusual. For France it was and is. But in Germany, which has long had a translation of Maupassant, two great publishing houses which cherish a platonic hatred for each other are now announcing complete German versions of the same Maupassant.

The lavishness of Germany is, I think, more to be commended than the encircled self satisfaction of France, while the duolingual publicity of Norway cannot help but bring that narrow kingdom to the attention of the world all around. If there is anything about

the country which any man might wish to know but which is not to be found in Mr. Hammer's opulent, alluring, and well written volume, it must have to do with the remote future. For he has neglected nothing regarding the past and present. What a travelogue some otherwise unemployed talker, who had never left his native and non-Norwegian heath or hearth, could deliver with this book as a basis and a satchel full of slides borrowed from the right firm for the occasion!

And how Norway lends itself to striking statements! Though it is much smaller in area than Montana, the distance between Lindesnæs and North Cape is as great as that between Lindesnæs and Rome or Moscow. Though so northerly in position, it has a luxuriant vegetation; of phanerogams alone there are 1,500 species growing wild in the country. It has been shown to the complete satisfaction of anyone except a Fundamentalist who believes that nothing happened before the year 1, that Norway was well inhabited in the neolithic stone age; that is, while the ice still covered the mountain wilds; that is, thousands of years before 1. In language it resembles what this country would be like if some insisted on speaking the tongue of Beowulf while others employed such words as Edward Bok uses. The Year Book has an illuminating section on grindstones; Norway exported 933 tons of them in 1921, a slump year. One of the longest chapters of all is on Norway and the World War, during which she lost, from direct hits, 829 ships—with a total capacity of

1,200,000 tons—and 1,162 human lives, in addition to 65 vessels with crews numbering 975 men that just simply disappeared in the war zone from unknown causes. Yet Norway remained neutral. This book, with its hundred odd chapters, each written by a specialist, is no ordinary annual.

A dual interest attaches to "The Diary of Otto Braun", that admittedly brilliant son of the singular Lily Braun—singular in being a Prussian militarist by birth, a Socialist Pacifist in words, and the mother of a volunteer soldier in reality. The boy was born in 1897. Too young for service in 1914, he went to the front on general principles. In 1918 he was killed. This volume contains his diary from January 13, 1907, to April 28, 1918, the poems he wrote, some of his letters, and a rather intricate heap of introductions, forewords, headlines, and footnotes. There is no question but that he was unusually endowed; this much has been conceded by the "Nouvelle Revue Française". On June 5, 1911, he writes about the death of Mignon in "Wilhelm Meister". He cannot fancy why she must die just as Wilhelm abandons himself to the "bourgeois serenity embodied in Teresa". Old minds have pondered on the same subject. His poems are good—for one so young.

But after all, that this book should have been published in Germany at a time when German publishers claim that more money can be made by holding print paper for speculative sales than by using it to bring out works of acknowledged masters, and that it should have been translated just now when it is about as easy to interest American publishers in translations from the German as it would be to interest a hotel syndicate in bar fixtures—this is interesting, for the in-

explicable is always interesting. Nor is it all. Herr Professor Dr. Petzold once submitted a petition of around 1,300 words to the Royal and Imperial German Ministry of Education, asking that he be relieved of all duty in connection with the Royal College at Spandau for three or four years so that he might devote his entire time to the then outstanding prodigy of the cosmos, Otto Braun. His letter was written on December 8, 1909. On March 17, 1910, he received a reply in thirty words informing him that the Minister of Education "most certainly refuses to entertain your strange request". Havelock Ellis, in his overnice and understudied introduction, feels that so great delay in answering the Petzold epistle is another instance of imbecile bureaucracy, while the refusal to entertain so plausible a wish reveals a hopeless obtuseness in matters of the spirit. I personally feel that however interesting the case may be, as interpreted by Havelock Ellis, it is even more interesting as a reflection of Prussian clemency. Dr. Petzold could well have been relieved of duty for all time on the ground of injudicious *Unternehmungsggeist*.

We are struggling at present with the immigration problem. The struggle, not wholly to our liking, is obligatory; for if someone lost the key to the turnstiles at Ellis Island, half of Europe would be over here before the taking of the next census. Herman George Scheffauer's "God's Own Country", recently done into German, may therefore fill a need: it may help to keep the thirty million Germans who would like to be landed at Battery Park, at home. For, as Mr. Scheffauer sees it, this is a pestilential land.

Now, there is no question that some of his criticisms, if stated in temperate language, would be well taken; no

man dislikes the specialist in boosting, the patent medicine man in optimism, more cordially than I do. I am longing for a chance to have a joust at statement and reply with that voluble nuisance, the hundred per center. But caricatures are amusing only, exaggerated contentions deceive none but the thoughtless; and untruth is untruth. Mr. Scheffauer begins with the remark that we "had not the slightest reason to declare war on Germany". He finds food for thought in the fact that all along Broadway nobody eats at home any more; everybody eats in the restaurants. And quoting Ludwig Lewisohn, he finds the American college student the original and aboriginal numskull. He says you look at his face, and though you see that he has not been a criminal, you see at the same time that mentality does not lurk beneath his sleekly combed hair (or her slickly bobbed hair).

The book has been well received in Germany. Though it is just out, there are two reviews of it in the February "Literatur". The reviewers claim that it will do much to clarify the mistaken notions the Germans have regarding "American Philanthropy", and that it will act as a healthy purifier, coming as it does on the heels of those two books by Alfred Kerr and Professor Dessauer, both of which leave this country in a halo.

Thomas Mann, born at Lübeck in 1875, is the son of a Lübeck merchant senator, and of a mother who was a native Brazilian. He has Creole blood in his veins, is generally conceded to be the greatest novelist in Germany, and "Buddenbrooks" is regarded as his greatest creation, unless it be the "Confessions of Profiteer Krull", published a month ago. It may have been this racial mixture in Thomas Mann which

persuaded his American publisher to be so explicit as to who printed the volumes, who furnished the paper, who did the binding — Americans all — and then to let it be known with singular vigor, or "vigour", that the translation is by an Englishman. Well, the translation may be approved by all Americans; it is much more than merely adequate. There were features of the original which defied acceptable translation, and these Mr. Lowe-Porter has wisely waived. That is, he simply did not essay them. The rest is wholly agreeable.

"Buddenbrooks" is a monumental bit of fiction. It treats the rise and fall of the family of this name from around 1800 to a few years after the establishment of the prewar German Empire. It is an object lesson to novelists in many ways. Thomas Mann hardly had to leave his father's fig tree to depict the lives of the hundred or so personages who have their entrances and their exits in this gigantic saga. He sticks to his initial plan, that of portraying actual life, without once digressing, after the fashion of George Eliot, to moralize on the ups and downs, the ins and outs, of his people. But you understand it; you see why these grain dealers in Hanseatic Lübeck were ennobled today and embarrassed tomorrow. If there is one unmotivated theme, it is that of the abnormal musical ability of the youthful Hanno Buddenbrook, the last of the fourth generation. How did he come by it? Not through environment, nor by heredity. But he has musical genius. Probably he derived it through the crushing drill he received in his home high school. His face showed that he had lived through unhappiness that spelled crime somewhere.

Each of these four volumes brings

out the misleading difference between Europe and the United States. But who will or can say that Europe is right and we are wrong? To maintain that we are deficient in culture is becoming a rostrum sport. It is, however, largely a matter of difference. We may not play skat, but we do play baseball. We do not have a Thomas Mann, but we do have a —— (let someone else fill in the blank).

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The Norway Year Book, 1924. First Year of Issue. Edited by S. C. Hammer, M.A., Christiania Correspondent of the "Times". Sverre Mortensen Bokhandel, Christiania.

The Diary of Otto Braun. With Selections from his Letters and Poems. Edited by Julie Vogelstein. Translated from the German by Ella Winter. Poetry translated by F. W. Stella Browne. With an Introduction by Havelock Ellis. Alfred A. Knopf.

Das Land Gottes, Gesicht des neuen Amerika. By Herman George Scheffauer. Translated from the English by Tony Noah. Paul Steegemann Verlag, Hanover.

Buddenbrooks. Translated from the German of Thomas Mann by H. T. Lowe-Porter. Two volumes. Alfred A. Knopf.