

### *Books the German Masses Read*

THE librarian of the Charlottenburg People's Library sent his yearly symposium letter to the principal popular lending libraries in Germany, asking for statistics as to the most popular authors. Although many libraries failed to reply, the results obtained were most interesting. The favorite author, as might have been expected, was Rudolf Herzog, a writer of patriotic and love romances without any particular merit, who has already grown so rich through his novels as to have bought himself a castle on the Rhine with one of the best wine cellars in the country. Ludwig Ganghofer, the former Kaiser's favorite, a writer of dialect love stories, took second place, but in the third we find a powerful realist novelist of rank, Clara Viebig, and in the fourth place, a modern German classic, Herman Löns, the nature writer, a genius much akin to Burroughs, at home with bird, beast, and every green thing of his moorland home.

The list of favorite foreign authors, often numerically as popular as the home inferior product, is far more creditable. Dostoyevsky takes the first place, followed by Tolstoy, Strindberg, Romain Rolland, Zola, Knut Hamsun, Tagore, and Dumas. Dickens and Mark Twain were asked for only twice, and one bold proletariat apiece ventured upon Kipling and Wilde. The record is pretty good, when one considers the type of reader who frequents these people's libraries, which are not on the same level as the well

equipped public libraries of the United States. All librarians reported also that the standard is slowly rising, and this largely thanks to the systematic work of these patient officials, who always attempt to persuade the doubtful reader to replace his intended worthless novel with a book on a similar theme by a better author. The worst rubbish which the lower class reader prefers to devour is of course not contained in these people's libraries at all. The sifting of the reading matter as to quality becomes more and more strict as the price of books continues to increase.

It is probable that the quality of the books read would have averaged lower had the replies come in from Berlin, Leipzig, Munich, Frankfurt, and some other big towns which failed to respond, for as a rule the small town—even among the readers of a people's lending library—shows a better level of taste and inclines less to cheap sensationalism.

Apropos of the price of books, the German Bookseller's Exchange in Leipzig has just given out new figures, which are expected to rise again before Christmas. Every publisher must calculate the peace price of the books he issues, and this organization decides how much per cent is to be added. At present this increase is 220 per cent, so that a two mark novel now costs 440 marks! The measure falls particularly hard upon the schoolbooks, and many schools are furiously buying large supplies in the hope of providing against worse times ahead. Scarcity and the rise of prices have the tragi-comical effect of preventing the issue of new school reading books, so that in republican Germany these readers are still full of tender studies of "An Afternoon with Our Dear Emperor in the Field", and patriotic

"poems" which were the latest effulgence of patriotism five years ago. Fortunately there is enough classic literature in a German school reading book to smother these individual fooleries.

Splendid books for the people are those which are issued by an extraordinary organization entitled *Der Volksverband der Bücherfreunde*. This is a vast book club, numbering over a hundred thousand members, who receive the right to buy from twelve books a year upward at absurdly low prices — even in 1921 only twelve marks and eighty pfennigs per volume! In addition to these new books, all achieving a certain high standard of literature, the members have a right to buy the cheap but beautifully printed and tastefully bound editions of the classics which the *Verband* gives out. The club is of course its own publisher, under the name of the *Wegweiser* (Guidepost) Verlag. It will interest American readers to hear that one of the books issued this autumn was the German version of "Main Street". The *Wegweiser* books are not for public sale. They can be bought only by members of the *Volksverband der Bücherfreunde*. A list of recent titles gives an idea of the wide scope and high quality of the reading matter offered. "Religions of Humanity — Part II: Judaism and Christianity" by Theodor Kappstein; a volume of Epictetus; Poems by Gottfried Keller; one of Fritz Reuter's famous dialect novels; Andersen's Fairy Tales; Dickens's "Pickwick Papers"; a volume of Goethe and another of Schiller; Geierstamm's "Swedish Folk Lore", as well as other books of younger and less famous authors. The existence of this society is a veritable blessing to the book hungry German in the present state of prices — the enormous edi-

tion, guaranteed (for no member ever refuses the chance to buy a book), renders the cheap issues possible. Perhaps such an idea might be a success in the States. It has an estimable advantage over the lending library, in that the books read remain the reader's property.

The extraordinary diaries and other literary remains of Lily Braun's nineteen year old son, Otto Braun, killed in the war, which sold in Germany by the hundred thousand, are now to appear in an English edition. Kurt Wolff, the Leipzig publishing house, are issuing a collected edition of the works of Gustav Meyrink, Germany's greatest fantastic - mystic romancer. The first three volumes, "The Green Face", "Bats", and "Walpurgis Night", have already appeared.

Recovered from the strenuous ordeal of his sixtieth birthday celebrations, Gerhart Hauptmann is holding a series of lectures in Holland, in all the principal cities. A disturbing factor at the university celebrations was the fact that the reactionary students, annoyed by Hauptmann's liberal political standpoint, refused to take part in the ceremonies. Hauptmann has now received a message from the overwhelming majority of Berlin students, all who do not belong to this narrow clique, expressing their veneration for the master and their disgust at the slight put upon him by these young hotheads.

"Liliom", Franz Molnar's New York success, is now being played here. Critics are not very kind to its literary merits; in fact Molnar has altogether the reputation of being a playwright concerned rather with the momentary theatrical effect than with the deeper dramatic result. But the title part is in the hands of Germany's greatest comedian, the inimitable Max Pallen-

berg. Pallenberg, like Coquelin and all great comedians, has a highly developed gift for the tragic, and is at his best in a part which combines the two rôles, or in which the humor is on the edge of tears. Pallenberg was recently playing the hero in the old London success "Grumpy", here rejoicing in the strange name of "Wau-Wau".

Two new books by women poets deserve special note. The first, "Ewiger Ruf" (The Eternal Call), is a volume of tender lyrics of home and child by Grete Gulbrannson, the wife of the celebrated caricaturist of the great satiric weekly, "Simplicissimus". Gulbrannson, who as a born Swede is able to view the German scene with an especially critical, satirical eye, has drawn delicate decorations for his wife's book. The Musarion Verlag of Munich are the publishers. The firm of Steegemann in Hanover are about to publish "Die Söhne", a lyrical drama in eight scenes by Frau Dési Stinnes, the wife of the coal king and trust magnate. Strangely enough, the work is strongly pacifistic. Frau Stinnes is reported to have had the book ready for publication for some time, but to have only just been allowed by her men folk to thrust this strange negation of the Stinnes policy upon the world. It is a tragic story of the conflict between the pacifist son who wishes to reform the world and his martial, war blinded brother. The war widow of one son, the bride of another, the old mother suffer their women's heartaches between the opposing worlds.

Karl Schönherr, the Austrian dramatist, has written a new drama entitled "Er, Sie, Es" (He, She, It). This play sets forth the problem as to whether a sick man has the right to

demand the continuance of his marriage. Only two characters appear in this singular piece, "He" and "She".

Berlin has been in the throes of an actor's strike, caused by the frightful deflation in the purchasing power of the mark in the last few weeks. All the important actors have been giving cabaret performances and hastily rehearsed renderings of ancient and modern classics in beer halls and assembly rooms in order to raise strike funds.

Two other new books by women writers are attracting attention. One is a volume of thoughtful short stories, entitled "Wege ins Dunkel" (Pathways into the Dark), full of deep womanly feeling and understanding of feminine psychology, by Erna Grautoff. Frau Grautoff, the wife of the well known art critic, Dr. Otto Grautoff, was best known as the German translator of Romain Rolland, until her first book, "Uta Curetis", published last year, showed her capacity as a novelist. The second book is a novel by Toni Harten-Hoencke, wife of Professor Friedrich Schöнемann, formerly assistant professor at Harvard. Her book, "Reifende Saaten" (Ripening Seeds), is a human story of love troubled and triumphant, the scene mainly laid in the author's native town of Kiel. The character of the rugged sea captain Lütt is particularly well done, and the author has used her knowledge of American life as a basis for some interesting discursions on national differences and misunderstandings. Erna Grautoff's book is published by the Deutsche Verlags Anstalt in Stuttgart, Toni Harten-Hoencke's by Johann Schwarck, Wilster in Holstein.

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