

By Louis Couperus. Translated by A. Teixeira de Mattos and Ernest Dowson. D. Appleton & Co.

THE TURBULENT MOVEMENT of *les jeunes* in Dutch literature, which began more than fifteen years ago, has crystallized in sufficient measure, at least, to allow of a survey of the field. The result, it must be said, is not as great as might have been expected. Of the many that have been active here, but two have taken rank with the prominent writers of other nations. Or, rather, only one, for Maarten Maartens is an English novelist, though he writes stories of Holland, and his method has nothing in it of "sensitivism." There remains, then, Louis Couperus, of whose books two have been translated into English before the present one. He may be considered as the representative of the sensitivist school, in method, in philosophy and in choice of subject. It is not an invigorating school: it is almost sickly in its power of introspection, fatalistic in its acceptance of the facts of life without even an attempt to find a remedy. "*Ehne Vere*," Couperus's best book, is a study of temperament, but of a temperament that lets itself be carried on and away by circumstances, with but the feeblest hopeless resistance; and "*Footsteps of Fate*" is a tale of fatalism, which repeats again this belief in the futility of all resistance.

The present book is an inquiry into the "states of mind" (the jargon of psychology has to be employed in considering the fiction of all nations, nowadays) of the heir to a mighty empire, whose shoulders bend in anticipation of the load they are to bear, the load which has been borne for many years by his autocratic father with superb, unquestioning belief in the Divine Right. It is not an easy task, indeed, for a common son of men to draw from his imagination the characters of emperors and princes. Therefore, perhaps, we recognize so many European rulers, living, dead, and to be, in the fictitious Emperor of Liparia and his numerous cousins and nieces: European history since the days of Napoleon III. has been freely drawn upon by Mr. Couperus, sometimes with startling directness. *Quod sis, esse velis*, applies to princes as well as to hod carriers; and this young crown-prince learns at last that his burden is as unavoidable as is that of the poorest of the poor. The soul-life of youth is often fraught with disheartening doubt, even with despair, before the mighty riddle of life that confronts it; and in his exalted sphere, as others in more humble ones, this Duke of Xara stands alone, a prey, moreover, to the physical degeneration of his sturdy race. He, who had planned to renounce his crown for the benefit of his autocratic little brother, was forced by death to assume it and to find the strength to bear its burthen. The analysis of his character, which might have become monotonous, is cleverly set off by the august crowd around him. The empress, haunted incessantly by her fear of assassination, the happy family life at Altseeborg, in that small northern kingdom where every year so many rulers meet in summer for a few weeks of unrestrained happiness, the princess, who is married for reasons of state with the news of the suicide of the man she loved still ringing in her ears—all these personages and episodes are handled skilfully, demonstrating that their author is a master of the art of contrast.

The methods of the sensitivists are illustrated to perfection in these pages. The touch of "impressionism in words," in the description of the royal gardens and palaces wherewith the story opens, the trick of occasional repetition, to which Max Nordau objects, but which is unquestionably effective—all these peculiarities have been retained in the translation, which follows the original perhaps a little too closely. In the original the story was published some time ago, almost simultaneously with Lemaître's "*Les Rois*." The resemblance between the two stories is remarkable, not in plot, but in idea. We like the Dutch story best: it is more delicately thought out, and goes deeper below the surface. But when all has been said, all due praise been given, the conclusion is unavoidable that this is a book of the period, not for all time.

It is a work of delicate art, no doubt, an admirable inquiry into the workings of the human soul under conditions that fall to the lot of but few of the children of men, but as we lay it down, it tempts us, as does most of the fiction in all parts of the world to-day, to give to the old, old adage a new meaning by saying, *ars brevis, vita longa*.