German Literary Pen Portraits

ONE thing which practically all German literary men have in common, a singular quality enough, is the fact that they do not look like literary men. Absent is the thoughtful brow, the bushy hair, the dreamy eye—not invariably, but in the majority of cases. Take the man who is by many regarded, aside from such veterans of a passing generation as Gerhart Hauptmann, as Germany's leading writer—Thomas Mann. This sensitive stylist, this author of the passionate "Death in Venice", of the epic idyl of dogdom known in English as "Bashan and I", of the great family-history novel, reminiscent of the "Forsyte Saga" and Arnold Bennett's Five Towns masterpieces, "The Buddenbrooks", looks, stiff and straight like the Lübeck patrician merchant's son that he is, like an English retired major who has taken up some genteel kind of trading in civil life.

On a recent visit to Munich, where he lives in a large, pleasant, square villa situated in a green outer suburb on the banks of the rushing pea green Isar, I had an interesting talk with Thomas Mann, one of the clearest and most statesmanlike thinkers in Germany. "How did you come", I asked him, "to the opinions in your famous 'Address to the German Republic'? You were formerly more inclined to the conservative view." Mann smiled a non-committal smile behind his large round glasses. "The man who does not spiritually develop, in such times as these, must be an idiot", he replied simply, and the German pronunciation *Idiōt* gave the word still greater emphasis. "Even if it exposes one to the charge of being a turncoat", he added. He said that it was very necessary for leading Germans who believed in the future of the Republic and in the humanitarian idea as expressed in the democracy of the future, to make their voices heard as loudly as possible, in order to counterbalance the few noisy reactionaries who might otherwise be held to represent the public voice of the country.

Thomas Mann had been spending some months in Spain, and spoke with enthusiasm of Northern Spain, of Castile, where landscape and people so thoroughly embody the soul of old Spanish pictures; and of glowing Southern Spain with its Africanish splendors. Mann spoke of his new novel, "Der Zauberberg", the scenes of which are largely laid in Davos. The hero is a young man who goes to Davos for three weeks, finds he is sick and remains there seven years in a net of enchantment woven by the "Magic Mountain", discussing heaven and earth, not omitting politics, with the motley assembly, including a number of Russians, gathered in the famous health haunt in the hills. The novel will probably be published early in the spring.

Mann—with his scrubby little mus-

tache, plentiful dark hair, medium height, and clothes of singular cut, with high semimilitary collar almost hiding the white one beneath—spoke idealistically of the future of Germany, recovering from a false and distorted romanticism which had become materialistic and returning to the paths of humanitarian democracy with an idealized America more or less as a lode star. The line of his afterwar spiritual development has thus led him into closer kinship with his brother Heinrich, with whom at one time he had little in common, and the fruits of this development will be apparent in the conduct of the many discussions which fill his new book, described by him as a "dialectic novel".

On the other side of Munich, on the banks of the beautiful Lake of Starnberg, lives Gustav Meyrink, whose brilliant satiric short stories formerly did much to carve away the earth from under the feet of the "distorted romanticism" of the old régime. Meyrink, whose hair is scant, and whose sharp look is that of a keen city man of intellectual tastes, has of late years become more and more absorbed in mystic literature, edits a collection of classics of magic, and writes novels so abstruse that the lay reader is prone to suspect that he is being hoaxed. But Meyrink, for all his vivid imagination, power of casting mystic glamour, and vein of ironic humor, is as serious as G. K. Chesterton in his appreciation of other-world phenomena.

A vast contrast is Walter von Molo, who unlike the two North Germans at home in southerly Munich, is an Austro-Bavarian living in Zehlendorf, an outer suburb of Berlin. With the exception of the veteran Arno Holz, von Molo—with his plentiful, unruly shock of hair, laughing eyes which can burn out of depths of gloom, mischievous laugh and buoyant vitality changing as suddenly to acute depression—is the only one of the little galaxy who thoroughly looks the part of author-poet. His temperament, combining gaiety and gloom in equal measure, has an Ariel-like quality. Yet his feet are firmly set upon the earth, and something of the broad, rough, hearty earthiness of the Bavarian tempers his Austrian artistic humor. He turns everything to fun, but beneath there is always a vein of tragic earnestness, and the strong creative imagination which has enabled him to vitalize historical figures in his great romances.

Georg Kaiser and Walter Hasenclever, two of the most modern dramatists, twin pillars of the revolutionary drama, are as the poles apart. Hasenclever, engagingly nervous, young, dark, slender, resembling a young Oxford man, is in a manner the expected type of the sleek youngster who overthrows the long since hollowed out pillars of the modern stage play. Georg Kaiser, sleepy eyed, broad faced, with domed forehead no longer rimmed with hair, with dry manner, speaking, looking, apparently thinking like an unimaginative business man, is yet a writer of far greater carrying power and lasting strength than the eager young Hasenclever. Yet a certain uneasy impression gained from the study of Kaiser's plays—that they are affairs of the brain rather than of the soul and heart—is strengthened rather than denied by a personal acquaintance with him.

There is room only for rapid portraits of two men who belong more to a past generation than to the age in which they live, yet who are both of them, by dint of their intellectual

youthfulness, vitally connected with the living hour. Alexander Moszkowski, savant and wit, lives in Charlottenburg, a once elegant inner suburb of Berlin, now resigned to being considered comfortable and old fashioned. His faithful wife protects him from the inroads of the inquisitive and intrusive storm of admirers, and Moszkowski, over seventy years old, grey of bushy hair and mustache, eagle nosed, keen eyed, full of sardonic Jewish esprit, sits all day at his desk and still presents a riddle of impossibly prolific production to the lazier and less gifted younger men. Witticisms, short sketches, above all oddities and enigmas of popular science flow with undiminished vigor from his indefatigable pen.

Arno Holz, on the contrary, serenely throned upon the lofty pedestal of his sixty years' poetry production, files, retouches, reedits, but composes no more, or scarcely at all. His lion-like head, with its mane of silky white hair and clear parchment skin, is lit by blue eyes that can sparkle and twinkle like a boy's. He lives in a poet's garret in a poet's quarter—Schöneberg, Berlin—a little nest of a place under the roof of a big apartment house, with a great view over suburban roofs, for Holz believes that a poet should have a good prospect of the sunsets and the stars. Friends look after the worldly welfare of the unworldly old poet, whose one concern is to perfect his great work "Phantasus", and whose one ideal is the recognition of his theory of poetic rhythm. On this subject he can grow eloquent and expound and, a little glass of bright liqueur before him, strive to initiate the willing but unmathematical hearer. As one listens, one thinks of the old proverb: "They whom the Gods love may die when they will—they will yet die young."

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