FOREIGN NOTES AND COMMENT

. . . . . guarda quanto Amore
Aguzza l'intelletto! . . . . .

IT is in the first act of his "Aminta" that Torquato Tasso indites the above exclamation: "Behold how love sharpens the intellect!" With Tasso himself the exact opposite seems to have been the case: he loved much and the more he loved the more irrational he became, until death relieved him in 1595.

I make no attempt in the following paragraphs to substantiate Tasso's proposition, for, unlike the efficiency fiend, I hold "impossible" an adjective in good standing in my lexicon. Whether love makes the intellect keener or blunter might well have engaged the attention of a Dark Age thinker to whom time was of no concern and space limitless. To a reviewer of today, however, whose space is determined by a determined editor, and whose time is the asset, or liability, of others, Tasso's shout is suggestive only. It suggests that love may influence the intellect. A sudden attack of it may cause a student to fail in his examination, just as an unalloyed vein of it may enable a statesman to see that national hate accomplishes nothing. I approach the splendid translations of the month, consequently, from the point of view of love's general bearing on the intellect, and not in the conviction that a little of it is all that is needed to convert a dullard into a sage.

There were about two dozen English translations of "Aminta" when Mr. Grillo began his work. It is one of those immortal bits of epic fiction, in verse, which might well be reviewed as though it had appeared yesterday, and not in 1573. Under these conditions it would be decried as the chant of a mind collapsed from an excess of affection: Sylvia is deaf to Amynta's appeals; she has decided to remain faithful to her Diana. Friends endeavor in vain to show her that Amynta would be a good catch. Daphne aids Sylvia; Thyrsis, Amynta. Much surprising at the bath, and what today would be the equivalent of weekend and automobile parties, ensue. Sylvia remains obdurate, Amynta obsessed.

Sylvia goes on a grand wolf hunt, after the fashion of the emancipated lady who gets her job with the local light and traction company rather than become a home maker. She is killed; of course she is, for her veil has been found in the woods. Amynta has taken his life; of course he has, for Ergasto brings in the sad tidings of his death with all the arguments for such a voluntary departure. He has leaped from a soulless rock into the vale of tears below.

No, no, this is all exaggerated. Amynta had leaped from a precipice, headlong and resolved, but he had landed on a soft bush below, the same soft bush on which Sylvia, her tussle with the wolf over, had found herself. The veil was restored through the lost and found column. With Amynta by the bosom of his beloved, who is now as gentle as she once was cruel, the play is done. The two are joined in happy wedlock, Sylvia convinced that so much effort on the part of Amynta means fidelity forever, Amynta buoyed up by the consolation that while the wooing was a bit strenuous it was worth the trouble.

Mr. Grillo has explained, in his sensible and illuminating essay on the pastoral drama, the state of affairs in sixteenth century Italy that made a play of this temper a glorious success; while his velvety prose translation, a page of his facing a page of Tasso, makes it seem reasonable for a publisher to bring out this book at this time: so much grace, so much charm, so much dignified handling of a potentially dangerous subject, so much beauty — and so much love. But whose intellect did it sharpen? Sylvia's.

There is such a thing as the "Romance mind". Tasso told a love story of unrelieved intensity. André Gide has done precisely the same in his novel entitled "Strait is the Gate", with this difference: Amynta won Sylvia; Alissa failed to win Jerome. The latter are cousins. Their love for each other was probably as strong as that of the protagonists in Tasso's pastoral. But the times have changed. Alissa learns that Jerome also takes kindly to her sister Juliette. That is enough: it makes Alissa feel that to give herself unequivocally to Jerome would be wrong. And consequently we have these two loving each other throughout the entire novel, once the expository introduction is over, with that burning yearning which has been focused in legions of Mediterranean epics to the delight of such readers as love a real love story, to the glory of Romance literature, and to the amazement of more practical people who fancy that the problem should have been settled with less sighing and more speed. Alissa dies. We are then given excerpts from her diary. The opening sentence reads: "My God, Thou knowest I have need of him to love Thee."

That is strong, but is it intellectual? In one of his letters Jerome writes with fervor but also with logic:

> Alissa, I love you too much to be skilful, and the more I love you the less I know what to say to you. Intellectual love? What am I to say to that? Since it is with my whole soul that I love you, how can I distinguish between my intellect and my heart?

That puts the affair on a more nearly practical basis. But even so it cannot be said that Alissa's love whetted her intelligence, unless undiluted happiness is to be found in complete renunciation. Jerome displayed sounder judgment. We are left with the feeling that after Alissa's death he sought a woman more inclined to say, "With all your faults I love you still." Sylvia won against a goddess; Alissa loses in the presence of her own sister.

As to "The Murder of Monsieur Fualdès", that is another story. It is a hate story. On March 19, 1817, Joseph Bernardin Fualdès went out from his home in the village of Rodez for a short constitutional before retiring. He never returned. The next morning his body was fished out of Aveyron Creek. In three hours the whole countryside was in a state of unexampled consternation. Who had stabbed, gagged, and drowned this faithful servant of the law, this onetime official of the Empire, this good Republican, this man who had figured intimately and importantly in such epoch making cases as those of Marie Antoinette and Marat?

The trial — a recital of which makes up the body of the novel — began. It lasted for days and weeks, for months and years. Citizens who had lived blameless lives were dragged to the bar, convicted on circumstantial evidence, and executed. The case took on international notoriety. And, significantly enough, M. Praviel's last chapter is entitled "The Death of a Saint". It leaves the reader under the impression that M. Fualdès was murdered by some plain assassins who escaped the hemp,

while desirable citizens were made to die in infamy because they were in Rodez the night the deed was done.

In his bright introduction, M. Prévost tells us that the novel was first submitted to him for publication in the "Revue de France" (1910), and that it was read aloud to him. He adds: "No manuscript that is uninteresting can stand such a test." This is golden truth. A man who can stand it to have an author read from his own works may have love — love for the reader — but he is surely deficient in intellect. M. Prévost's praise then is high; and it is deserved; for the novel is a creation of unusual fascination. The truth is, hate may sharpen the intellect more than love. Of love there is but little here. The lawyers for the defense are professionals; the love that is made a part of the tale is shady. But of hate there is no end. And it is hate that makes such a lawsuit possible and keeps it going until justice has been blinded by disingenuous argument and deafened through mendacious evidence based on hearsay and submitted in the interests of scandal, which is the lowest form hate may assume.

Of the nine truly great Greek stories before us, I select "The Sin of My Mother" by George T. Bizyneos. This mother had had a little daughter. The father and mother had gone to a party one evening where cheap wine was plentiful and dancing unconfined. Late — for parents — they started home. The mother, tired as the caretaker of an infant may become, nursed the child in her bed, fell asleep while so doing, and woke up in the morning to find that her tiny baby had been smothered.

She prayed for another girl, but boys were born. She adopted a girl, christened her Annio, the name of the dead child, and tried in this way to feel that there had been no death in her family. It was an unfeasible scheme. Moreover, Annio died. She adopted a second girl who was ugly to look at and still uglier in disposition. It finally occurred to her one son George, the one she had seemed to slight, that there was something on her mind. He asked her point blank why she was so anxious to have a daughter. She told him the story of the smothered baby.

One day George chanced to be in Constantinople, where he was given an audience with His Holiness, the Patriarch. He explained the case of his mother and asked the Patriarch to absolve her. His Holiness did this gladly: he declared that her sin had been unintentional and that she might go in peace. The mother replied: "He is a celibate. He has never had children, and he cannot know what it is to kill one's baby." It was not love that sharpened this Greek mother's intellect; it was intellect that made her love intelligent.

Of the twenty priceless stories that make up the volume from Czechoslovakia, I select "The Vampire", by Jan Neruda, who died at Prague in 1891. A number of people had gone on an excursion from Constantinople to the island of Prinkipo — that now noted spot where, in the winter of 1918-19, Lloyd George and his colleagues at Paris-Versailles were minded to meet the fur lined Bolsheviks from Moscow with the view to patching up a peace. There were but few people in this party, the chief of which were two lovers and a young Greek who seemed to be an artist. The lovers were desperately in love, but she was dying slowly from a dread disease and he had taken her to Prinkipo for her health. The hotel proprietor refused to entertain the Greek because he was known as the vampire. That is, he would paint people who were on the verge of death, having an uncanny instinct regarding the time of ap-

proach of the grim reaper. The lover in Prinkipo, hearing of this, and having noticed that the Greek was busy with brush and canvas, rushed at him, rolled him in the sand, and saw, to his intense dismay, that he had sketched the head of the lovely girl, her eyes closed and a wreath of myrtle on her brow.

There is no end to the things that a man may love; there is no limit to the types and classes of love. There is no similarity between the love of a mother for her child and the love of a man for a maid. This young Greek vampire loved corpses. There are characters in French literature that have had the same weird bent. R. Brimley Johnson has written a section of this new and sterling appreciation of Jane Austen in order to prove that what the author of "Pride and Prejudice" really loved was books. Mr. Johnson lays it down as a basic proposition, as a great truth, that Jane Austen's realism was based on books and not on human nature; that she wrote books not because she loved people or knew much about them, but because she loved books and knew much about them. She is alleged to have bought books, not because she needed them — for she already had copies of them — but out of a deep set solicitude lest they fall into unworthy, unloving hands. That would be book loving raised to the zth power, but would such a love sharpen the intellect? It depends. Tasso himself would have dubbed such an individual a man of gauche habits and uncouth heart.

In Léonie Villard's "Jane Austen" there occur these words of sober truth and sound reflection:

> The women who lead useless lives and bored existences — unloving mothers and indifferent wives, women whose beauty has been faded by time, though time has not developed their hearts and minds in compensation — are very numerous in Jane Austen's novels.

Of course they are, for Jane Austen treated primarily the English gentry, and of the four classes that make up human society in the established countries of the Old World, that is the class that is least capable of having its intellect sharpened by love, or its love made intelligent through the judicious use of intellect. To know great love or great hate, it is necessary to be either a vagabond, a hard worker, or a person with a pedigree.

To say that love sharpens the intellect is like saying that fire will make the tea kettle boil. Fire will do that, but that is by no means the only function it may and can perform.

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Aminta: A Pastoral Drama. Edited with an Essay on Renaissance Pastoral Drama, and Prose Translation from Torquato Tasso, by Ernest Grillo. E. P. Dutton and Co.

Strait is the Gate (*La Porte Etroite*). Translated from the French of André Gide by Dorothy Bussy. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Murder of Monsieur Fualdès. By Armand Praviel. Translated by Doris Ashley. With an Introduction by Marcel Prévost. Thomas Seltzer.

Modern Greek Stories. Translated by Demetra Vaka and Aristides Phoutrides. With a Foreword by Demetra Vaka. Duffield and Co.

Czechoslovak Stories. Translated from the Original and Edited with an Introduction by Sarka B. Hrbkova. Duffield and Co.

Jane Austen: A French Appreciation. By Léonie Villard. Translated by Veronica Lucas from *Jane Austen: sa vie et son œuvre.* With a New Study of Jane Austen, Interpreted through "Love and Freindship", by R. Brimley Johnson. E. P. Dutton and Co.