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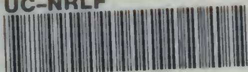

Foreign Literature in Translation

By ZORA I. SHIELDS
Department of English
Omaha High School

Read before the Nebraska Library Association at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting, held in Lincoln, Nebraska, October 30-31, 1912

Printed for the Omaha Public Library by the courtesy of Mr. C. N. Dietz,
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Foreword

The fiction shelves of the average small public library contain little except a few standard English novels and the works, in more or less completeness, of our American writers. That much of our current fiction is of slight value the librarian knows, and that to confine her purchases to our own writers leads to provincialism. She would like to add books more vigorous in tone and she would like to introduce her patrons to a world beyond our own borders, but in approaching foreign fiction she feels the timidity of venturing into an unknown field. The tradition of wickedness still clings to the "French novel."

It was to stimulate in our Nebraska librarians an interest in these continental writers and to inform them of what was desirable and available in translation that we asked Miss Zora Shields, a woman of unusual attainments and breadth of reading, to prepare this paper for a meeting of the Nebraska Library Association. The limited edition, printed chiefly for use in our own state, was quickly exhausted and an unexpected demand came from outside. To meet this demand it was decided to reprint. In reprinting for more general distribution, this word of explanation seems necessary, for it will be seen that the purpose of the paper was only to suggest and not in any sense to furnish a complete bibliography.

CHARLOTTE TEMPLETON,
Secretary, Public Library Commission.

Foreign Literature in Translation

I have limited my subject in two ways: I have considered only fiction, the novel and the drama; and I have tried to keep to the nineteenth century, and toward the close rather than the beginning of that period.

Twenty-five years ago, even fifteen years ago, the average American had little or no acquaintance with European literature. If he were well-read, he knew Goethe, Schiller, Victor Hugo, Dante, Cervantes. But usually he was indifferent toward all "foreign" writing, even contemptuous, feeling that Shakespeare and the Bible were all he needed in the way of literature.

To-day the situation has changed. In literature, as in all other lines, the range of general knowledge demanded in everyday life has broadened immensely. We are brought into daily, almost hourly communication with all parts of the globe; the cable, the telegraph, the increased facility of travel—everything combines to bring us into touch with other peoples. In a new sense we realize that "Nothing relating to man is foreign to me." Also this is the age of psychology, the study of the human mind; so we are interested not merely in the government, the wealth, the products of these peoples, but more in their manners, their characters, and their modes of thinking. In no way can we so easily begin to study a nation's thought as in its literature, especially in its novel and drama, which are direct portrayals of human life. So to-day, the American reading public demands the modern writers of Europe. Our newspapers and magazines are filled with references, criticisms, and discussions of the later writers, the more recent novels and dramas of the other world. This fact shows that these must already be known and of interest to a large number of people; also it arouses curiosity among those not already informed. To read one's paper comfortably in these days, it is necessary to know who or what these men are,—this Strindberg, or d'Annunzio, or Górki.

Then for a broad view and an adequate understanding of our own literature, we must know books other than those of our own

race; our English authors have borrowed and imitated on all sides, to understand them more clearly we must know their originals, their models, or their masters. The well-read person now must be familiar with the drama in Norway, in Russia, in Germany, if he would listen intelligently,—say, to an American problem play. More and more we realize the truth of Matthew Arnold's words: "The criticism which alone can much help us for the future is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result."

And when we consider a matter of even deeper importance than the appreciation of literature, we find that the most striking and important problems of the day,—social, political, sex, religious,—all have been treated more fully, more carefully, more earnestly in European writings than in English or American,—perhaps because these questions have been brought home more pressingly in older and more crowded communities. So there is a great and serious reason for our study of these books, not so much because they suggest remedies, for they give only vague, tentative directions for the most part, but because they state the case so clearly, paint the picture with such wonderful accuracy of detail; they are experts in diagnosis. And any cure can come only after a thorough understanding of the disease.

There is yet another reason, an urgent, imperative need, that we should become familiar with the minds, lives, and characters of our European neighbors, for these very Europeans are in our borders, they dwell with us, they are soon to be our fellow-Americans. How can we hope to make American citizens of them, unless we understand their strength and their weakness, that we may develop the one and remedy the other? We gain some of this knowledge from contact with the people themselves, but slowly and imperfectly, for they are dazed and bewildered in a strange new environment, their national characteristics are blurred. Their books, the embodiment, the very essence of their national spirit, can give us this much needed information more clearly, and far more quickly. Perhaps we are inclined to look down on these people as "foreigners," to despise them a little as our inferiors. But as we study their masterpieces, we must lay aside our arrogant sense of superiority, to realize that in a literary way we are unsophisticated beginners who are permitted to go to school to great artists. We are made to recognize facts to which our eyes have been closed, we are thrilled and swept along in

lofty flights of imagination, we see laid bare before us the human heart and soul with all its intricacies of vice and virtue—and there is little room left for petty pride; we must feel toleration, sympathy, respect, brotherhood, toward the races which have given the world an Ibsen, a Tolstoi, a Maeterlinck.

If then, from the standpoint of public need, it seems essential that the public library should contain a considerable amount of modern European fiction, there is still another motive which must appeal to the librarian, and that is the charm and attraction offered by the new, the unusual, the unfamiliar. Stories of out-of-the-way corners of the world have always had a mighty fascination for countless readers, and here are hundreds of books about places known to most of us only by name. True, English authors have imitated these books, but the freshness and force of the original is more alluring than any copy. To a librarian who is struggling, almost vainly, against the popularity of a Robert Chambers, a Harold McGrath, an Augusta Evans Wilson, it would seem a boon indeed to see a list of books, attractive, thrilling, exciting, and really worth printing. To be sure translations are inadequate, faulty, and generally unsatisfactory, but even crude translations often reveal the great thought or the wonderful work of characterization, though we must miss the beauties of sound and style and all the delicate shades of meaning.

There are two notes of warning to be sounded. In the first place, many of these books are not intended for amusement; the true purpose and value is revealed only after careful reading, re-reading and study. They are worth the time required, but they can never be popular. The lovers of mere plot, who are filled with a feverish excitement of curiosity as to how the story is to end, will do well to stick to "The Prisoner of Zenda" and its hundreds of imitations. Then, too, as to sex and religion, these Europeans seem to have a point of view other than our own. There is a franker, bolder attitude; details from which we shrink are recognized as necessary factors in human life and characters. I feel an essential difference in the treatment of sex relations among the Northern and the so-called Southern races. I believe almost all thoughtful, serious people admit that Ibsen and Tolstoi dwell on such problems, not out of love of portraying morbid erotic and neurotic conditions, but because of an agonized perception of a destroying ulcer, and a sincere desire to effect a cure. Is not Jane Addams actuated by the same motive? It may be questioned whether that is the motive in many French, Italian,

and Spanish writers, or whether we find there mainly delight in riotous emotionalism. For this reason I feel that for general circulation more of the literature of the North than of the South is advisable. And there must be a choice. Once the librarian who wished anything but classic German literature was limited to translations by "E. Marlitt." Now such a flood of European literature in translation is surging upon us, that we have to choose. My list does not pretend in the least to be complete, even up to this year, 1912; it merely presents some of the books which appear especially interesting or valuable, or which have aroused an unusual amount of discussion. Each year brings us so many new translations, of constantly increasing attractiveness and value, that no list could long pretend to be complete.

Among the peoples of Europe who offer us literature that we can not afford to miss, are Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Germans, Russians, Poles, Spaniards, Italians, Belgians, Hungarians, Frenchmen. Certainly comparisons are odious here, and it were a rash critic indeed who would venture to pronounce on comparative merits, to declare one literature more important than another, for each has its own special contribution to the intellectual content of the world. But we still have a fondness for calling ourselves Anglo-Saxons, so we may logically begin with Teutonic races, and among them with the Scandinavians, when we consider how many Norwegians, Danes and Swedes are within the borders of our own state.

Modern Scandinavians are alert, progressive, brilliant, keen and clear thinkers along practical, ethical and artistic lines. To-day we are just beginning to awaken to a realization of the tremendous importance of Norse myth and saga. Comparative philology, history, Wagnerian opera, modern art, all direct our attention to this field; here too there is a new realm of wonder, of supernatural beings and events marvelously appealing to child and youth—an entirely new Arabian Nights. Brunhilde, Freya, Valhalla, Yggdrasil, Sigurd, Balder, Odin, the Valkyries,—can any names be more potent? We find in Scandinavian literature a terseness, a vigor, an intensity of feeling and expression which seem peculiar to these peoples—an intensity essentially different from Celtic or Oriental fervour and passion, but no less stirring, with its background of glaciers and fjords, dark, turbulent waters and lands wrapped in snow. The spirit of the Vikings still lives, still sweeps all before it in irresistible victory; the "splendid

seriousness" is still there, and still may it be said, "Hard and cold grey, with hidden fire, was the temper of these people."

It is surely unnecessary to say that a complete edition of Ibsen's dramas is much to be desired. Whether we feel antagonism or admiration for this modern prophet, at least he has stirred more minds, and aroused more discussion than any other one modern dramatist; and to arouse thought, to awaken the world to some of its weaknesses and mistakes was surely his aim; Huneker calls him "a dynamic grumbler, like Carlyle." It is absolutely necessary to know "The Doll's House," "Ghosts," "The Pillars of Society," "Hedda Gabler," if we try to keep up at all with the march of modern thought.

If we shrink from the pessimistic pictures and cold, abrupt, clear-cut style of Ibsen, we find the opposite in his famous friend and rival, Björnson. "Synnöve Solbakken," "Arne," and "The Bridal March" must attract youth as well as age, with their marvelous simplicity and idyllic qualities, their depth of understanding for the sufferings of youth, its shyness, ignorance, restlessness and passion. Björnson is not merely happy, he is joyous; he expresses himself with simplicity, clearness, and terseness. Since he loves the people and is the very personification of the democratic spirit, he seems especially suitable for our Republic. Two books of his later years are interesting in a deeper, more problematic way: in "In God's Way," Björnson has studied carefully the effect of narrow orthodoxy, conventionality and prejudice; in "The Heritage of the Kurts" he has given us a new ideal of education, its problems, methods and aims, very appealing to us because we are beginning to work a little along the lines he suggests. A drama, "Sigurd Slembe," seems to me important because it deals with the old Viking period, so stirring and wild, and still has for its central problem a modern ethical question. If we can draw near in any way the Eddas, the Sagas, it certainly is worth while.

Another Norwegian writer, decidedly less familiar in America, is Jonas Lie. In this man himself and reflected in his work, there is a strange but attractive mixture; he is the son of an able, practical Norwegian lawyer with an intense grip on reality, and of a mother of Finnish or Gypsy blood, who imparted to her son a love of the eerie, the uncanny, a fondness for luxuriant wealth of color, a sympathy with the wild, the untamed, the rebellious in nature and in human beings. "The Barque Future" is interesting because of its realistic picture of sailors'

and fishers' life in Norway, also for its touches of weird Finnish life and character; it is a haunting tale with an intensely realistic and prosaic plot, which still is permeated by a romantic atmosphere. Much like it is "The Pilot and His Wife." But in "Niobe" and "The Commodore's Daughters" the other side of Lie's mind appears, for they are detailed stories of every-day life, convincing in their simple reality, the exact study of the psychology of modern family life, just as true in America as in Norway. Lie reminds one somewhat of Arnold Bennett, but his work is simpler, the outlines are clearer, and he is always intensely in earnest.

One or two books of the Swedish writer, Selma Lagerlöf, are desirable, because of her vivid imagination and very unusual style. Following no law, no rule, she has worked out in "The Story of Gösta Berling" several important problems. She belongs to the extreme romantic school and her short stories in "From a Swedish Homestead" and "The Girl from the Marsh Croft" are almost like Irish folk-tales.

To some Strindberg is an insane and immoral monster; to others, he bears a great message. He certainly has aroused great admiration among European critics and considerable discussion in England and America. The story runs that Ibsen said of him, "There is one who will be greater than I." But he can hardly be considered for general circulation.

When we reach German books, we realize anew that the English and the Germans were sister-races of the same Teutonic tribe, for our literatures are kindred, and resemble each other strongly. We find many of our ideas of morality and ethics, the same familiar atmosphere of every-day home life, the same commonplace vices and virtues, something of the same emotional restraint. This very similarity makes it hard to state the difference, to say just what makes German literature distinct. The German is philosophical, introspective; he is a student, a worker, a thinker, a deep ponderer on the problems of life, of the soul, of fate. He is consciously introspective; he does not write to amuse, to entertain. His study of souls may take the form of intense realism, as in Hauptmann's "Weavers," or it may appear in lofty symbolism as in "The Sunken Bell." Whichever it is, it is built on the basis of the slow, exact, careful spirit of German scientific research, to which the whole world does homage. Solidity and depth seem to me the chief characteristics, for to Germany we owe Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kant, Hegel, Leibnitz, Mommsen,

Ranke. Of course it is to be assumed that all libraries own the works of Goethe and Wagner. There are many German writers to-day of skill and importance; I shall attempt to discuss only the three or four most prominent.

Hauptmann is certainly most lofty in thought, view, and purpose. He sees the errors, the pettiness, the degradation, the failures in human life as well as any realist, but he has a nobility, a lofty morality, an ultimate faith which save him always from the air of sordidness and debauchery of many modern realists. "The Sunken Bell" and "Hannele" are necessary in a progressive library. They are not simple, they will never be popular, but neither is Shakespeare's "Tempest." Less familiar is "The Weavers," a play which may well win attention everywhere in these days of labor agitation, for it is an accurate painting of the misery of a Silesian weavers' strike. "Lonely Lives" is introspective in the extreme, since it shows us in one blinding flash the agony and struggle of old-fashioned, orthodox parents of an advanced, philosophical son, of a simple, loving, uneducated wife, and of a progressive, educated modern woman,—these are not caricatures, but real people. "The Rats" summons before us the tragedy and complications of life in a tenement. "Rosa Bernd" is a most sympathetic study of the struggle made by a beautiful, lower-class girl, who finally sinks beneath the horror of modern social conditions,—and fate. "And Pippa Dances" will furnish an enigma over which to study indefinitely.

Sudermann is more simple, easier to understand, more popular; his characters are real men and women and his situations are familiar, but we may quarrel with the probabilities of his plot and his conclusion. He is not the deep philosopher, but the dramatist, watching for effective stage tricks. "Dame Care" grips us with its sordid financial struggle and the petty but bitter anxieties of family life. "The Joy of Living," wonderfully translated by Edith Wharton, and "Magda" are becoming so familiar to us as we see them on the stage, that we even dare to differ from the interpretations of Mrs. Fiske and Mrs. Patrick Campbell. To my mind, one of Sudermann's best bits of work is "Fritzchen," one of the three little plays in "Morituri."

With much less technical skill, less literary craftsmanship, Frenssen has aroused general interest because of a bare, uncalculating, homely portrayal of the lives of a group of people. He is somewhat like De Morgan, or Dickens; he shows the same kindly sympathy, the same ultimate optimism, the same careless,

involved structure, the same love of digression. Of "Jörn Uhl," one critic has said: "This book has sprung from the deep consciousness of modern Germany and utters the longings, thoughts and aspirations of the German heart in a way no other modern book has done. It is a living book, it is a book throbbing with real life, passion and poetry." Again, "Frenssen's books sing of nature and human life, grand, strong, and true; of confidence in man, in the eternal powers, in God. They sing of a simple, original Christianity—the religion of Christ, the Man of Galilee." Undoubtedly Frenssen's greatest book is "Jörn Uhl," some even say he is an author of one book, so again he reminds us of De Morgan. For myself I have exactly the same experience: "Joseph Vance" may be De Morgan's greatest book, but I cannot give up "Somehow Good" and "It Never Can Happen Again;" so also I am very glad Frenssen wrote "Holyland."

Ebers gives us a chance, a rare one, to read historical novels of ancient Egypt, written by a thorough scholar in Egyptology. Auerbach and Rosegger permit us to know and love the German peasant. And so on.

Within the last ten years, Slavonic races in great numbers have been surging into our land, and to many of us that has seemed a danger, a menace, for we thought them crude, almost savage. In our beet-fields, in our stock-yards are almost numberless Russians, and of Russia we know little or nothing. For the last twenty-five years Europe has praised Russian literature and Russian writers, but America is barely beginning to appreciate their greatness. The race is puzzling to us in many ways: we begin to see their capabilities. Within the last year Mary Antin has taught us a much-needed lesson. In the May Atlantic of this year Margaret Sherwood has characterized Russian literature very aptly: "In the Russian work there is a deep and tragic sense of fate, an undercurrent of emotion which makes their apparently unmoved recitation of details full of tragic power. One finds it in Tolstoy, in Turgénieff, in Dostoiévsky. It comes from a depth of temperament that perhaps has in it something of the Oriental sense of unfathomable meanings. Of the thousand and one facts of daily life the Russian can work out a drama of destiny wherein the very surroundings seem heavily charged with significance. That splendid, listening impersonality of the Russian, the sphinx-sense of mystery, is a race characteristic, and cannot be borrowed. ... That patient suspension of judgment during long brooding no race can imitate."

To-day the Russian writer best known in America, practically the only one known generally, is Tolstoi. Whether he be an artist, a philosopher, a great author, a religious teacher, or only a gigantic mistake and a pathetic failure, is a question useless to discuss. This at least is true: he has emphasized the value of independent thought, of simplicity of life, of purity in spirit and art, of courage. He may be merely a fanatic, but to many men in Europe and America, he has been and is a Master. He has surely given us masterpieces in his studies of the primitive life and mind: "The Cossacks," which some one has called "a little idyl of the Caucasus," "Master and Man," "Hadji Murád," "The Three Deaths," "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch." The most discussed books are "Anna Karénina," which discusses marriage without love, and "War and Peace;" in Russia these are put into the hands of young girls; with us young girls and boys and older people will refrain from two and three volume novels. His religious writings are more likely to be read, especially "My Confession" and "My Religion;" and of his dramas much emphasis is being placed on "The Power of Darkness." An eminent critic who does not praise Tolstoi overmuch says "a stranger who would understand Russia of the nineteenth century must read Tolstoi."

A much greater artist, a much kindlier nature, a more fascinating writer is Turgénev. Both in style and thought he is attractive; even in translation we can appreciate his beauty and delicacy, his aptness of expression. In "Dream Tales" we find a weird, mystic, haunting sense of the supernatural; "Poems in Prose" are marked by a loftiness of emotional appeal, a keenness of insight into the soul of man, and an unerring perception of the slightest details in nature, which are truly poetic. In the novels, "Fathers and Children," "On the Eve," "Smoke," "Liza," "Virgin Soil," there is the simplicity, not of the primitive mind but of the highest culture, and a sympathetic appreciation of the most involved problems of modern life. According to able critics such as Taine, Turgénev was one of the most artistic natures that has been among men since classic times. One writer has said of his work that it is "a symphony, a sweet and solemn music like the sounds of the forest;" and another that "Turgénev is, without exaggeration, the best word-painter of landscape that ever wrote."

Entirely different from these two Russians is Dostoyévski, the great psychological expert. Bazan says: "He leads us into a new region of aesthetics, where the horrible is beautiful, despair is consoling, and the ignoble has a halo of sublimity; where guilty

women teach gospel truths, and men are regenerated by crimes; where the prison is the school of compassion, and fetters are a poetic element." This man, whose personal experience shows almost every horror, brutality and suffering that occurs to us in connection with that land of police spies, the knout, anarchy, massacres, Siberia, reveals to us the uttermost sufferings, not merely of the human body, but also of the human soul. More than any other Russian, perhaps more than any other European, he is influencing modern literature; for his interest is in finding a redeeming spark in the souls of all, even of the most degraded. An epileptic, born in a charity hospital, sentenced to be shot in prison, enduring four years of hard labor in Siberia, facing hunger, cold, debt continually, he speaks from actual knowledge, not imagination. "Crime and Punishment" is called the profoundest psychological study since "Macbeth." If Dostoyévski shows us only one side of life, he paints that to perfection,—suffering humanity.

There is still another Russian, with still another type of book. Gogol's "Tarás Búlba" is a wild, thrilling, barbaric tale of an old Cossack chief; it may well be called a Russian epic, for while it is written in prose, it breathes a primitive, heroic, national spirit and action. It carries the reader along in its sweeping enthusiasm; even in its wonderful descriptions of nature we feel, not the artist's fondness for a picture, but the Russian's idolatrous, passionate love for his boundless steppes with their flowers and birds, their mighty rivers, their stretches of snow and ice. The lavish and vivid figures of speech are Homeric; there is nothing commonplace or hackneyed about this book. But pick up a volume of Gogol's short stories, "St. John's Eve," for example, and a surprise awaits us; for in "Old-fashioned Farmers" two childish, puttering, old people are drawn, with a wealth of detail and a love that attains pathos. "The Cloak" is a study, careful and true, of the poverty-stricken life of a poor old copying-clerk, bitter, dreary, tragic. Gogol's understanding of the untamed Cossack did not dull his loving perception of the simple, gentle, kindly old house-wife and the mediocre clerk.

When we turn to the books of the Latin races, there appears a great difficulty and a new problem. Their life is not ours, their thoughts are not often ours, their language is very far from ours. It is only in basic human qualities that Teutonic and Latin peoples can sympathize. So, in these writings, it requires time, and study, and re-reading to understand even faintly.

Foremost among them are French books, and here are so many authors whose names are famous that one is confused at the very outset. We must all be acquainted with Victor Hugo, Dumas, both father and son, George Sand, Jules Verne, Eugene Sue. But beyond that the ordinary reader must limit himself; he can hardly hope to become acquainted with all modern French literature; he must choose types. Also this motto should be emblazoned above French books: "The French novel is not for the young. It is the fruit of maturity, addressed to maturity." Which, being translated, means that they dwell on sides of life which English writers avoid or at most touch very lightly, for their conventions are very different from ours. But this is a great, a very great literature. Ever since mediaeval days Frenchmen have been masters of the art of story-telling, they are still masters. French prose for more than a hundred years has been counted one of the most perfect mediums in the world for expressing thought; English writers have learned from the French. But the casual reader is bewildered by this wonderful artistry in words; when there is added to that, Celtic emotionalism, and modern realistic standards both in material surroundings and in psychological study, he is beyond his depth. These books are great, some from the point of view of exquisite style, some from the keenness of emotional portrayal, some because of real understanding of the human mind and heart and soul; but for the most part they are not pleasant reading, except to the morbid. Dostoyévski's stories of idiots, epileptics, and Siberian exiles have a less depressing effect than Flaubert's minute, exact, painfully accurate study of innate human depravity in "Madame Bovary." Somewhere Stevenson has referred to the hideous thoughts that crawl like reptiles in the minds of all of us. Much of modern French fiction seems to me an analysis of these slimy thoughts. And there is a blackness of pessimism here that robs even the beautiful words, pictures, and thoughts of their sincerity; nothing seems real or worth while. The Greek, the Norse, the Russian have the pessimism of fatalism, they see the futility of man's struggle; but the Frenchman has no belief in humanity.

It is a pleasure to turn for a moment to the great Belgian mystic, Maeterlinck, who may be discussed here, because he writes in French. It should always be remembered that this symbolist is one of a large French school, but he is the only one familiar to an English public. More and more he is coming to be a factor in modern literature. His writings have an air of mystic holiness;

the material world hardly exists for him; the soul is all that is real, or interesting or important. By mystery, fairy-like atmosphere, strange whispers and endless repetitions, he lulls to sleep the ordinary senses, our critical faculties, our inherited prejudices and literary conventions; and we, as souls, watch one soul speak to another. It is the very antithesis of materialism. To quote from Symons: "All that he says, we know already; we may deny it, but we know it. It is what we are not often at leisure enough with ourselves, sincere enough with ourselves, to realize; what we often dare not realize; but when he says it, we know that it is true, and our knowledge of it is his warrant for saying it. He is what he is precisely because he tells us nothing which we do not already know, or it may be, what we have known and forgotten." "The Intruder," "The Blind," and "Home" are the simplest, the clearest, for no one can fail to understand and be deeply moved. "Monna Vanna," in many ways more conventional, seems to most critics a marvelous analysis of the innermost relationship of human souls in society. And Maeterlinck's essays are proving to many people just as interesting as his plays.

Turning again to French writers, we must bear in mind firmly that here are hardly a dozen books to be put into the hands of boys and girls, or of the indiscriminating reader. But many of these French books are wonderful works of art. Since these authors are so many, and so different, it has seemed easier and shorter to give you many brief extracts from prominent critics in an attempt to characterize these men.

Many of the greatest French writers belong to the realistic school, which has for its master, Balzac. Symons says that the complexity, the confusion, the turmoil of the nineteenth century has demanded a new epic, and that the novel with its infinity of detail, as Balzac has created it, has become the modern epic, the equivalent of the hurrying life of great cities. "The novel, as Balzac conceived it, has created the modern novel, but no modern novelist has followed, for none has been able to follow, Balzac on his own lines." For to Balzac the important thing is not the endless detail itself, but the fact that that detail was the expression of a man's brain, heart, will; he never forgot the human problem back of all the struggles; he is interested in the way each man works out his fate, and is not sure that one way is more correct or better than another, so he watches and paints all impartially. To understand the greatness of Balzac, read "Père Goriot" and then "Clayhanger," in which Arnold Bennett is attempting to use

the same method. Balzac's books are not meant to entertain, but to teach. But these modern Frenchmen do not stop their plot to moralize, as did George Eliot; they realize that their story, their plot, if perfect, ought to teach the lesson more forcibly than any sermon; for in a sermon the truth is told us, but in these books we are compelled to work out to this conclusion in our own hearts and minds, so it has become a part of us. Even if it is true that no one before thirty can understand Balzac, stillan y one can read and feel the greatness of such a masterpiece as "Eugénie Grandet."

After Balzac comes a long line of authors, each different, each striking. Flaubert, the greatest of Balzac's successors, is even a greater artist than the Master. His is a perfect style, but he lacks the sympathy, the kindliness of the other; Flaubert in the coldest, cruelest way possible dissects the human soul. Saintsbury says: "The ordinary novel is a compromise and a convention. Of compromises and conventions Flaubert knows nothing. He dares in especial to show failure, and I think it will be found that this is what few novelists dare, unless the failure be of a tragic and striking sort. He draws the hopeful undertakings that come to nothing, the dreams that never in the least become deeds, the good intentions that find their usual end, the evil intentions which also are balked and defeated, the parties of pleasure that end in pain or weariness, the enterprises of pith and moment that somehow fall through."

Of the other realists, Zola and Daudet are the best known; Zola because he is so terrible, so sickening, so filthy, because he sees in humanity only the beast; Daudet, because he unites with realism a sense of humor and an appeal to average human sympathies.

Another group of writers in France are the story-tellers "par excellence." Here belong Gautier, Maupassant, Coppée, Mérimée, Pierre Loti. Gautier has given us "Captain Fracasse," a romantic tale perfectly suited for children in their teens, of a perfectly good young nobleman who goes through a series of amazing adventures. Gautier is a master of words, of pictures; he loves beauty and color—gold, marble, and purple. His short stories, translated by a master of English also a worshipper of beauty, Lafcadio Hearn, are models of the art of description and narration. He loved the Orient. It has been said: "His stories are a substitute for opium and hashish, and take us into a world like that of old romance and myth, where we meet our own souls

walking in strange clothes." Maupassant is a cynic, who paints by means of his senses, the things that appeal to the senses. James says: "He fixes a hard eye on some small spot of human life, usually some ugly, dreary, shabby, sordid one, takes up the particle, and squeezes it either till it grimaces or till it bleeds. Sometimes the grimace is very droll, sometimes the wound is very horrible; but in either case the whole thing is real, observed, noted, and represented, not an invention, or a castle in the air. Maupassant sees human life as a terribly ugly business relieved by the comical, but even the comedy for the most part is the comedy of misery, of avidity, of ignorance, helplessness and grossness." But through one of the strangest freaks of genius, this cynical Maupassant wrote "Pierre and Jean," a masterpiece of understanding, of sympathetic understanding, of a dreary tragedy of every-day life. Mérimée is the author of two works practically perfect; "Carmen," a wonderful story of the Spanish gypsy, as fascinating as the familiar but never hackneyed "Toreador Song" in its dramatization; and "Colomba," a living expression of the wild, fierce Corsican spirit, in its independence and cruelty and revenge. These are simple, clear-cut, almost Greek studies of elemental passions and elemental people. Coppée is known mainly for his short stories, which are almost un-French in their purity and moral elevation, very simple, very touching stories of the lives of the lowly, tales like the work of modern Scandinavians. In one called "At Table," he gives us a vivid picture of the beauty, the splendor, the attractiveness of a banquet among aristocrats; then he makes us feel just how much misery, agony and tragedy have gone to produce each detail of the banquet. Pierre Loti, whom some one has called a French Kipling, cannot be judged by any literary standards we have set up. It is easy to find blemishes in his style, and he is very simple, with little concern about modern psychological complexities; also he is not immoral, but unmoral—morality means nothing to him. But if this roving sailor, who personally is the most exquisite fop, had given us but one book, "An Iceland Fisherman," that tragic tale of Breton fisher-folk would have gained him lasting fame. Lovers of the strange, the exotic, can find in Loti the essence of Oriental emotion, whether in Turkish harems, in Africa, Egypt, Jerusalem, or Pekin. Gosse says: "There is no more curious phenomenon in the existing world of letters than the fascination of Loti. Here is a man and a writer of a thousand faults, and we forgive them all. . . . For those who have passed under the spell of Loti, he

is irresistible. He wields the authority of the charmer, of the magician, and he leads us whither he chooses. The critical spirit is powerless against a pen so delicately sensitive, so capable of playing with masterly effect on all the finer stops of our emotions."

Bazin seems almost an exception in French literature; he is not merely moral, but deeply religious, with the haunting, melancholy sweetness and resignation of the Catholic Church; he dwells in an air of spiritual elevation and serene peace. Anatole France, on the contrary, is the personification of scepticism, of irony, of the spirit of the fashionable man of the world. But this sceptic wrote "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard," a book of sweet, wholesome simplicity, a beautiful book about a dear old man who is a profound scholar and yet intensely human.

A French writer, perhaps not of the first or second rank, but of great charm, clear vision, and deep sympathy, is Edmond Rostand. However much we may criticise "Chantecler," and say that it isn't art, that the thought is trivial and obscured by the unusual but classic device of portraying animals, we never forget that Rostand created also "L'Aiglon" and "Cyrano." That pitiful, heart-rending picture of "L'Aiglon," Napoleon's son, with all the delusions and enthusiasms of youth and the final failure of the frail human creature to live up to his opportunities, is a triumph of the newer, the modern romanticism. "Cyrano" is one of the few characters in French fiction generally known to English readers; he is a French "Sentimental Tommy," he is a study in the egotism of the average man, with his dreams and boasts and sentimentalities, drawn with true Celtic perception of the ridiculous, the pathetic, the tragic.

"Cyrano" is so plainly modeled after "Don Quixote" that Rostand may easily be taken as the connecting link, or the introduction to Spain, the land of chivalry, the land of "The Cid," of Cervantes, of Calderon. Brunetière says that Spanish literature has "preserved for us all that deserved to survive of the spirit of the Middle Ages." Here as in France we find many novelists and dramatists, though even the four greatest are unknown to the American public, even by name. All who know Spanish literature agree that here are minds well worth our study. Valera, Valdés, Galdós, and Echegaray, are all to be had in translations, and unusually good translations. One critic says: "Valera, for all his polite scepticism, is a Spaniard of the best, a mystic by intuition and inheritance, a doubter by force of circumstances and education. His best will be read as long as Spanish literature

endures. He is a great creative artist, and the embodiment of a people's genius." Galdós is "a prolific inventor, a minute observer of detail, who combines realism with fantasy, flat prose with poetic imagination." His works are absolutely clean. Valdés is not Spanish, he is cosmopolitan. He will never be a popular writer, for he demands study, since he emphasizes spiritual values. Of Echegaray a writer in Poet Lore says: "There is a profound idealism about the dramas, a lofty impatience of conventional moral standards, an intense conviction of the inherent relations of sin and retribution, a stern and rugged grandeur which remind one of Victor Hugo, to whom Echegaray is, in fact, often likened by the Spanish critics." To me, he seems more influenced by and akin to the stern work of Ibsen. At least here is the lesson of duty and morality voiced for us by the far South.

To characterize modern Italian literature seems well nigh impossible; for in the four prominent writers of to-day there are seen two distinct types. Fogazzaro, Serao, and Verga are serious, high-minded artists, intent on the ethical value of human life, showing their Italian nature mainly in a beautiful style, more riotous in color, figures and imagination than French simplicity, and also in the Southern impulsiveness and in the fervid passion of the Tropics. Fogazzaro, who has something of the sweetness and religious atmosphere of Bazin, is interpreted for us by an Italian critic: "He works for the unraveling of perplexing problems; to bring clarity where seeming darkness reigns; to add greater dignity to man by enlarging his mission beyond terrestrial usefulness; to harmonize progress with his faith. Idealism and deep sane faith form the essence of his life." One of the foremost writers of modern Italy is Serao, a woman and a realist. A newspaper reporter by training, she knows how to use effectively the most trivial details; in "The Ballet Dancer," we are made to feel the grinding poverty of trying to keep up appearances by the poor girl's worries over her six-year-old plume, which she had curled over the back of the scissors, and which would be ruined by the rain; but there is more sympathy and human understanding in Serao than in most French realists. Verga, whom we know mainly as the author of "Cavalleria Rusticana," is an intense realist, who gives us the life of Sicilian peasants. Like Hardy, whom he resembles, he shows us grim reality. Of the "House by the Medlar-tree," Howells says: "I can praise Verga's book without reserve as one of the most perfect pieces of literature that I know. When we talk of the great

modern movement toward reality, we speak without the documents if we leave this book out." Verga's story of the poor little "St. Joseph's Ass" is one of the most pathetic and convincing tales of the sufferings of man and beast. Verga seems to me a master of realism.

The Italian writer most talked of to-day is d'Annunzio. One critic sees in his works symbolism: "There are in d'Annunzio, reachings out toward a new and more spiritual conception of life, though he has descended into hell for his vantage-ground." For myself, I fail to get the symbolism, the grosser details obtrude themselves on me; I feel a sensualist reveling in his sensuality, though all must admit a beauty of language which is new to the literature of the world. Kennard seems to me to express very vigorously what most readers will find in d'Annunzio. "The body, the body, the flesh and the sensations of the flesh—this has appealed to him as the most marvelous thing in the universe, to which all else must contribute and interpret. To these lesser sensations he is keenly alive. He can describe a kiss, except for its spiritual significance and communion; he can describe an ankle, he can describe a hand, so that there is nothing lacking. He perceives, too, all that is in a sunset, save God and the soul; to these he is insensible. . . . Of the tragic beauty, the sad poetry of human destiny, he only gives us a superficial understanding. He knows life's fitful fever, but he does not know life's real richness and serenity. He knows life's storms, but not life's calms; life's weakness, but not life's strength. He shows us beauty, but it is hectic beauty. D'Annunzio is ignorant of the majesty of the human soul, of the sublimity of human existence, and of the Powers of the World to Come; consequently this apostle of Joy, Art, and Beauty never feels the true joy, never attains the highest art, never knows the true soul of beauty."

To conclude, I fear that I have impressed you unduly with the fact that there is a large amount of modern European literature to be had in translation. I feel sincerely that much of it is very valuable. But if a library has limited means, there is a chance to get a general acquaintance and a sort of flavor of this foreign fiction in the magazine called Poet Lore, which in the last ten years has turned its attention largely to publishing translations of these writers, together with criticisms and discussions of their merits. And here, as in other lines, the Everyman's Library is doing very wonderful work.

We have, as I see it, a duty, an opportunity, and an omen

of great good fortune: a duty, to stop wasting our time and money on our own popular novels and magazine stories, which are, for the most part, trivial and useless; an opportunity, to read and know books which open up a new earth and a new heaven; an omen of what the American people and the American literature may be in the future. If Scandinavia, Germany, Russia, and Italy have great literatures to-day, great literary ability, why should we not hope to reap the benefit? Scientists are wont to say that the mingling of blood and culture made the English race what it is.

This is our task to-day, and no people have ever worked on so large and splendid a project. Can we amalgamate Norse enthusiasm, German philosophy, French artistry, Russian mysticism, and Latin emotion into a new American race, American literature?

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