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BALTRUŠAITIS' REVIEWS

August Strindberg. **Götiska Rummen. Släkt-öden fran sekelslutet.** Stockholm. Hugo Gebers forlag 1904.

Every new book of Strindberg has profound importance not only as the work of an enormous talent, but as an inspired indicator of **those recurrent** inner conditions which all contemporary life has approached or is approaching. For the historian of the comparative literature of the second half of the past century it will be impossible not to make note of the circumstance that in the painful quest of his time, the famous Swedish writer was one of the first to reach the **divide** from the height of which it became at last possible to distinguish with greater clarity the further direction of mankind's inward path. One must remember that during the whole course of his creative activity Strindberg not only participated in all the complex experiences of west-European society, was not only an **eye witness** of the successive changing of tastes and ideas, of the setting up and abolishing of life-governing precepts, but with all the strength of his peculiarly responsive, inhumanly intense soul, took the liveliest part in the experiences and **in himself** felt all the weariness and creative bitterness of inwardly experiencing them. The existence of this experience, into which Strindberg put all the passion of his being, powerful and whole beyond the custom of our days, all the fearlessness and inflexibility of his truly lion's will, seems indeed to be that which absolutely assures his psychological penetration and far-sightedness and conveys to his art a disturbing breadth, a general human value, and all its startling persuasiveness.

This persuasiveness is particularly precious in him chiefly because at the base of the majority of his works lies an indignant cry of negation. At the very beginning of his creative activity it was Strindberg's fate to experience a time of maximum waning in both the intellectual and political life of Swedish society of the 60's. The only thing that to a certain extent broke the profound quiet of the post victory slumber of the petit bourgeois was the polemic roused by the brochure, famous in its time, "On the Incompatibility of Hell with the Mercy of God." The social ferment and entire life concern of those grandfatherly days were so far behind that triumphant philistinism had complacently taken possession, by right of antiquity, of absolutely the whole of life's property; and Strindberg, whose entire being strove so urgently toward movement and creation, was obliged to begin the same kind of liberating task as had been performed in neighboring Norway by Ibsen. With a youthfully daring hand he sounded the alarm, and his whole art seemed for Sweden an ever more brightly burning Savonarola bonfire, into the flames of which were going all the ugliness, all the heartlessness and meanness, all the human blindness and impotence of the people who momentarily passed before it. Indefatigably subjecting his entire surroundings to a pitiless scrutiny, Strindberg was not satisfied with the artistic interpretation of the several sides and phenomena of life; he did not limit himself to the creation of a long series of positive and negative types, sketched with genius, but with the propensity for broad generalizations and conclusions which was characteristic of him, he strove from time to time to weigh the current position of things in its whole extent and volume. So it was in his first big novel, "The Red Room," so it proves to be now in the novel "The Gothic Room," in which he, sorrowfully and with inspiration, sums up the thirty years of his creative work, and first and foremost what has happened to human life before his eyes.

In their play, both these works form one continuous whole, with only this inner and outer difference, that the first of them was written with all enthusiasm, with all flashes of youthful passion, while the second is marked by all the auctorial self restraint of a powerful artist, and reveals in him a great and silent meditation over many years on the dark behests of life. If certain pages of "The Red Room" are striking in the subtlety of the psychological pattern, the clarity of the images and the accuracy of the words that express these, the majority of the chapters of the latter novel can stand on a level with the best examples of art in general. To the most remarkable pages of the book belongs the chapter devoted to a survey of the spiritual condition of mankind at the end of the nineteenth century, so rich in efforts and undertakings. On the basis of this chapter, as of all the themes of the novel, it is necessary once more to point to the fact that in Strindberg's person have been united in a rare harmony a remarkable sensitivity of soul, a free eternally searching mind, and a will overshadowed by endless gusts of passion, which knows no rest on height once attained, but strives indefatigably toward an ever greater fullness and wholeness of life, toward a more and more joyful liberation.

Vesy, No. 6, Moscow, 1904; translated by W. Edward Brown.

In Memoriam Oscar Wilde. Herausgegeben von Franz Blei. Insel-Verlag, Leipzig. 1904.

Oscar Wilde's work has profound significance not only because in it was expressed an outstanding and original talent, but also because in these elegant images and brilliant aphorisms are reflected the whole character, all the impulses and inclinations of the contemporary soul. In our enigmatic days, when evidently humanity is taking an abrupt turn toward a different psychological structure, the English poet's whole inner destiny is particularly instructive in the sense that it was as if it were the experimental application of ethical and aesthetic theories which sprang up at the first signs of this turn, or perhaps as a premonition of a rebirth, no longer far distant, of the human will toward new impulses, more stable and more comprehensive. In this connection it must be remembered that this aristocratic **cherishing** of his own being, this cult of personality, unconditional for Wilde, were directed by no means toward a beautiful satiety, seeking diverse self-gratifications, but were evoked by a torturing concern for doubling the life force in man; were deeply marked by the fateful and tragic craving of a new Faust. In this is his entire psychological value, and in this is also the complete justification of his mistakes. — The present brochure gives a clear enough picture of the poet's spiritual condition after his release from Reading Gaol. In the desultory conversation here set forth between him and a few friends is glimpsed a titanic and sorrowful soul, which through the motley play of everyday experiences always and everywhere was striving to apprehend the harmony of the world in the fragmentariness of external things, to contemplate the eternal in the accidental... The Russian reader, acquainted with Oscar Wilde only by hearsay, and even that in a distorted way, will find in these pages both a series of his aphorisms and a few short stories, extremely characteristic for our author, and incomparable in their artistic mastery... We do not deem it superfluous to cite Wilde's opinion here expressed about Russian literature, extremely noteworthy as a finale of his whole spiritual life: "These Russian writers are marvelous; what especially lends their books such greatness is the sympathy that goes into them. Once I used to love Madame Bovary; but Flaubert would not admit sympathy in his work, and hence it is narrow and stifling. Sympathy is the open side of a work of art, from which it appears to be infinite... Sympathy is the most marvelous thing!..."

Vesy, No. 4, Moscow, 1904) translated by W. Edward Brown.

K. Balmont. Gorniya veršiny ("Mountain Peaks"). Collection of articles. First book: Art and Literature. Moscow 1904. "Grif" Publishing Co. Price: 2 rubles.

Any opinion of one writer about another writer, like the opinion of any one person about another, even given an undoubted capacity for remaining objective, does not so much exhaust the inner world of those whom it has in view, as it reveals the spiritual essentials of the one who is expressing the given opinion. Particularly is this fact displayed in those cases when we are dealing, as with K. D. Balmont, with a feeling of consciously assumed kinship. Because, in speaking only of what is kindred and near, and thus of what belongs most immediately to one's own moral experience and makes up the whole content of one's own inner concern, one resorts involuntarily to his own most intimate words, one communicates to them the whole clarity and force of his own convictions, and in general discloses to its full depth his own inner being, which is otherwise accessible only to himself... Besides these qualities of being a clear indicator of the views, sympathies and tastes of its author, Balmont's book has also the particular significance of being chiefly concerned with questions and figures upon which the attention of the artistic criticism of Europe in the last twenty or thirty years has been fixed. It is enough to mention such names as Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, Francisco Goya, Oscar Wilde, Knut Hamsun and the like. The entire book is written in brilliant language, with that abundance of figures and diversity of colors which generally distinguish the whole work of our poet. The separate sketches, moreover, are noteworthy for the novelty of their point of view, and reveal in the author a lofty gift for psychological penetration into the complex essence of the human soul.

Vesy, No. 4, Moscow, 1904; translated by W. Edward Brown.