

A REPORTED TREND IN NOVEL READING

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IN the newspapers not long ago it was reported that in England readers of fiction are asking more and more for the books of some nineteenth-century writers—Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Anthony Trollope. (It seems strange that George Eliot was not mentioned.) Possibly in Canada the same thing is happening. This sets one thinking. Week by week, from the publishing houses, new novels pour like grain from a threshing machine. Anyone who reads even half of them can have no leisure to spend on writers of another age. Can it be that some of these new novels are being left unread, while instead old favourites are being re-read? If so, our publishers to-day are perhaps partially misjudging the public taste. However that may be, these writers, that they should be finding readers when this century is nearly half over, obviously must have something that makes them wear well.

Jane Austen died in 1817, and, in her died a thoroughly modern novelist, even though she was—according to Saintsbury—one of the two great pioneers of the English novel. Anyone who has not read Jane Austen, and happens to pick up a book of hers, may say to himself, "Here, I suppose, is a quaint tale containing some old-world charm, shot through with much primness and prudery." How wrong he will be! Her novels—with one exception—are perfectly congenial to modern taste. They are tales full of brilliant wit, and they deal with people who differ from ourselves only in moving through life more leisurely, with rather more ceremony, and in understanding the art of conversation. In plot her novels are not strong, but by that no reader of our age need be disturbed. Many present-day novels are, rather uneventful chronicles than tales with a definite structure, and are none the worse for that; and there are others which would have little more plot than Jane Austen's, if the authors did not lean hard on fornication or adultery as indispensable props to the story.

Anthony Trollope has said that, to a potential novelist, there are only two requisites; to have a story to tell and to be able to tell it well. Trollope himself certainly possessed these two requisites; and his characters live and the books are delightfully amusing. In them there is little that can be called "dated," except that here and there a girl—even the heroine—behaves so

priggishly that the reader longs to shake her. Of course, as we read, we must try to forget how the women were dressed, forget the men's beards and whiskers. I doubt if many present-day readers could stand the test of reading an illustrated edition of Trollope's works.

Charlotte Brontë, alone of these three writers, has fire. Because she has this compelling fire, her characters are tremendously alive and her books have vitality. Perhaps we always identify Charlotte herself with some one or other of the characters in the book. Her unique and pathetic history—in fact, the history of the whole Brontë family—is present to our minds as we read; and on every page we seem to feel Charlotte's presence.

We of the twentieth century have not quite learned to relinquish our contempt for Victorianism in all its manifestations. We imagine that we have gone a long way forward from the ultra-modesty of everybody and everything of that day, including the novels. Perhaps the pendulum did swing too far that way, but the novels surely lose little through any such limitations the authors place upon themselves. One smiles at Trollope's agonized protest to his publisher. He assured that august being that, in putting, or intending to put, into a story an incident of a "curtain lecture" of a wife to her husband there was no intention of being indecent! Perhaps Queen Victoria has here something to answer for. Trollope's novels could do with a little more life, and they might have had it, if he now and then had let himself go. The Victorian restraint of Jane Austen (who, however, was pre-Victorian) and Charlotte Brontë was apparently natural and unconscious. Jane Austen is the most unsentimental of writers; never was a woman more so. She could write a perfect love story, such as that of Darcy and Elizabeth; but, such is her reticence, or her characteristic economy of words, that she did not record one single kiss. Did Darcy, then, not kiss Elizabeth when he had asked and been answered, "Yes"? Ruthlessly, Miss Austen leaves any kisses to the imagination. Although we would like to have been told of just one kiss by Darcy, we need feel no surprise, seeing that this novelist nowhere even describes a dress. She is a woman, yet she will not tell us what anyone wore—not even Elizabeth. The most we learn at any time is that she, on one occasion, dressed with particular care, to delight the eye of George Wickham.

To cast a random eye over the twentieth-century world of

the novel is to become bewildered. In the variety of the accumulation one comes near to asking, "Who is there who has *not* written a novel?", rather than, "Who are the novelists?"

To a Canadian, one name, I think, is sure to come to mind, that of Mazo de la Roche. She has made a little niche for herself in to-day's literary structure, with her series of tales of one group of people. Since she once won an important fiction contest, she must have something, whether we are among those who like to admit the fact or not. Her literary skill is undeniable. Her characters live and the stories carry us along, our interest undiminished, to the end. It is an achievement to portray a woman of ninety-eight years of age and invest the character with enough vitality to make it interesting.

But does Miss de la Roche present true pictures of life? I say, "No." She succeeds in peopling her books with some very unpleasant persons. Her "Rennie" is nothing less than a libertine, and the misbehaviour of other characters seems somehow not inevitable, but forced by the manipulations of the author. Such is the poverty of Miss de la Roche's imagination.

Now pick up a book of A. J. Cronin's—say, *The Keys of the Kingdom*. It brings, as it were, a rush of pure air. It is like a spring from the hills flowing into the pool of the mind, left a little stagnant or muddy, perhaps, by de la Roche. Such a fine portrayal of a beautiful character one does not often come across. Forceful, dramatic, as had been *The Stars Look Down*, it had had a blemish—the records of adulteries committed. These episodes, as far as I remember, were not indispensable to the story, and need not have been fully described. Neither does Cronin, although he does not applaud the adultress, condemn her. Yet her actions strike one as particularly mean, particularly treacherous.

Besmirched in the same way is the popular novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Perhaps the best thing that can be said about this book is that its title has been felicitously chosen. In spite of its title, I, having read *A Farewell to Arms*, opened the book without enthusiasm. I toiled, literally toiled—fortified by many cups of tea—through the first two hundred pages, asking myself at intervals, "Why was this book written?"

The dialogue is jerky. Does Hemingway imagine himself another Thomas Carlyle, to dispense with rules, at pleasure? There are far too many scraps of Spanish. A phrase here and there in the appropriate place would be effective.

Such phrases of French in Brontë's "Shirley" and of German in some of Countess von Arnim's books are delightful ornaments to the story, but this is a little artifice of the novelist, which Hemingway cannot manage well. With him it is merely a pose.

When I finally reached, without skipping, page two hundred, the truth flashed across me; "This is not a novel; it is a scenario." Granted that the story moves finally to a dramatic and moving climax, and that such characters as Pilar and dear old Anselmo have such appeal—nevertheless, I contend that Hemingway's conception of this tale ought to have come forth as a drama or a scenario for a moving picture, rather than as a novel. Why, then, did he make a novel of it? Because to do so was immeasurably more profitable. He must have had his eye, as he wrote it, on the subsequent filming of it. Such a thing has been done before. The novel, *We are not Alone*, was such a very poor effort for Hilton, and made such a very good moving picture, that one is forced to the conclusion that Hilton wrote it for the screen. One can imagine a critic of drama exclaiming, if told the story *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, "Hemingway certainly has something there—has the makings of a fine dramatic piece." But the ordinary novel reader is not interested in a promising sketch for a play. What he demands is to be entertained by a story clearly and beautifully set forth in graceful English and in as few words as possible—a story which moves smoothly and (if a tale of adventure) swiftly to the conclusion. Now mark Hemingway's method:

. . . which led to nowhere, then to nowhere, then again to nowhere, once again to nowhere, always and forever to nowhere, heavy on the elbows in the earth to nowhere, dark, never on end to nowhere, hung on all time always to unknowing nowhere, this time and again for always to nowhere, now not to be borne once again always and to nowhere, now beyond all bearing up, up and into nowhere, suddenly, scaldingly, holdingly all nowhere gone . . .

and farther on in the tale:

. . . They were having now and before and always and now and now and now. Oh, now, now, now, only now, and above all now, and there is no other now but thou now and now is thy prophet. Now and forever now. Come now, now, for there is no now, but now. Yes, now. Now, please now, only now, not anything else only this now and where are you and where am I and where is the other one, and not why, not ever why, only this now; and on and always please then always now, always now, for now always one now; one only one, there is no other one but one

now, one, going now, rising now, sailing now, all the way now, rising now, sailing now, all the way now, all of the way now . . .

After *this*, who is there who does not cry out, "Oh for a deep draught" (of Austen, Brontë, or Trollope) "in this dull hour!" Also I believe that the mature reader baulks at being told the intimate details of what happens when a girl crawls, uninvited, into a man in his sleeping bag, having first set eyes on him only on the day previous. Hemingway, no doubt, would say proudly that all this is admirably daring; others might call it inartistic and decadent. Young readers may perhaps eagerly lap up such passages. No young people, even the noblest, are without some curiosity on the subject of sex. Older readers, however, will probably skip such parts of a novel, if they see them coming. The situation between man and woman is reminiscent of the novel, *Without Armour*; but how differently it is handled! *For Whom the Bell Tolls* seems, in this respect, an unworkmanlike imitation of Hilton's beautiful story of exalted love.

One could name other novelists of the last quarter-century who have shown at one time or another a rather repellent approach to the subject of sex. Obviously they believe that this pleases a majority of their readers. It has been said that an editor of a newspaper goes to his grave not knowing and still wondering which dishes of the varied menu which he has provided for his readers has pleased them and made possible thus the continued existence of his newspaper. The same could be said of a novelist. Many ingredients go to the make-up of a novel, and the author does not know whether any of them could be left out or not. Some present-day novelists must believe that they would be very unwise to treat the subject of sex in their works as Austen, Brontë and Trollope treated it,—unwise even to approach the attitude of those writers.

Love thou the rose, yet leave it on its stem . . . Judge what thy sense can reach not, most thine own . . .

This is the idea that nineteenth-century writers express in their technique. These contemporary authors of ours who (whatever they deem makes for popularity in a novel) use the other, the inartistic technique, know very well what is art and what is not art, and the worst aspect of the matter is not that they debase their art, but that their books bring to the healthy minds and souls of many a youthful reader the first breath of corruption. It is regrettable that these novelists show so little awareness of the awful responsibility which they thus incur.

GERMANY AND THE COMING PEACE

ROBERT MILLIKEN

IN all the suggestions and speculations and discussions about the coming peace very little mention or recognition has been given to the part Germany is supposed to play in the arrangement. And yet it must be apparent that any peace, to be either satisfactory or permanent, must have Germany as a conciliated and contributing subscriber. She cannot be ignored or left out. What is likely to be her attitude—the spirit in which she will approach these negotiations?

It has been estimated that at least seventy per cent of the German nation became thoroughly imbued with that superiority conviction and savagely brutal and aggressive spirit that makes them the reproach and by-word of the civilized world. Will the humiliation and loss or defeat be sufficient to change all that overnight! The causes underlying such a result, and the causes necessary to counterbalance and correct such a condition, must be thoroughly understood and appreciated before anything approaching an intelligent treatment or a remedy can be evolved.

It has been said that the legend concerning what is called the Aryan branch of the human family which Hitler appealed to and stimulated so much, and which has also done so much to produce the egotistical insanity of the German people, originated first about the beginning of the nineteenth century with a certain Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau—a Frenchman—who published two volumes entitled *The Inequality of the Human Races*. The thesis sought to be established was that some races are natural rulers, and that whether or not the human race sprang from a single original stock, the racial differences are now permanent. Such ethnical inequality is not the result of institutions or of climatic surroundings. The character of peoples is independent of the countries which they inhabit.

While Gobineau claimed for his work that it was based on scientific principles and a scientific examination of the data furnished, this was not considered satisfactorily established, and the contention did not make much impression at the time. Later on it was taken up and defended by a people already beginning to labour under a "superiority complex," and a world much better prepared than when it was first given. But

even then something more was necessary to bring about the tragic results seen in the German attitude and character at the present time. That "something more" was brought about by world conditions.

A great deal of criticism and so-called humorous exposure—wise and unwise—has been expended on what is generally called the mid-Victorian era of English history, its mawkish sentimentality, its portrayal and glorification of life and experiences that were largely conventional and unreal. All this has been sufficiently written up—and ridiculed—at least to enable us of a later age to arrive at a true estimate of what was genuine and valuable and what was not. Whatever may have been its weakness and its ridiculous idiosyncrasies, it still stands as a period of great constructive thinking and writing, as well as in a marked progress of all that makes for a nation's wellbeing.

It had an atmosphere of faith and reverence about it that, while it might easily degenerate into superstition and weakness, gave it a basis of spirituality and idealism which was not much inferior in its output to the great Elizabethan Era of English growth and power. Even with all its conventions and make-believe, it was not lacking in the most material contributions of scientific progress, scientific discoveries and inventions—as well as economic and industrial advancement in almost every department. The corrective, too, was at hand—already on the way. A correction that was not only to make us conscious and perhaps a little ashamed of our cheap religiousness and easy acceptance of but unsubstantiated though pious dogmas and doctrines, but was also to bring with it a reaction which thoughtful men and women are now beginning to recognize and fear as one of great tragedies into which mankind occasionally falls and which interfere so seriously with real culture and progress.

Like Luther's drunken peasant who, in trying to mount his horse, gave himself such a hoist that he threw himself over on the other side! We, in our endeavour to escape what we despise as mere sentimentality and unreality, have gone so far that we have brought about a time when almost everything that is material and godless, under the guise of a pseudo-science, has been apothecozed and worshipped. Fortunately in this age we are becoming awake to the mischief, and by taking heed may yet escape what otherwise might very easily prove to be a racial, perhaps a world calamity.

The three men most concerned, who did most to lay the

foundations of this threatening transformation, of which the full effects we are only beginning to realize—were Darwin, Marx, and Wagner, each in his special sphere. Darwin, with his theory of Evolution and everything arranged for by “accidental variation,” politely bowed anything like God out of human life or human affairs. A great and valuable and helpful contribution to human knowledge; but none the less purely material and negative. Marx, with his *Das Kapital* and his elevation of “Economic Determinism” and the “proletarian struggle” as the supreme forces in an advancing civilization, took up Darwin’s story and applied it in the sphere of the economic, industrial, and political. So conscious was he of his obligation to Darwin that he wanted to dedicate his book to his friend—who declined the honour. Wagner, in the sphere of Music and Art, was equally unbelieving and equally devoted in his worship and glorification of the God of materialism and force. I asked a friend one time who had been an organist in one of the great British cathedrals, and was a recognized master and exponent of Wagner’s music, if there was a kind of concentrated word or brief phrase that would express the inner feeling that Wagner’s music made upon him in his more sensitive moments—after all his years of devotion and interpretation. He said there was one word that kept constantly repeating itself in his inner consciousness—that word was “ferociousness.” The atheism and materialism of Darwin and Marx made still more penetrating by the mythological draping in Music and Art by Wagner!

Germany, in a sense, lay open to the invasion of this new world barbarism and reenthronement of force. It was peculiarly sensitive and peculiarly sympathetic to ideals and teachings of that kind. Already it had the heritage of the Prussian domination as well as the glorification of militant ruthlessness and aggressiveness bequeathed to it by Frederic the Great. In addition to this, and perhaps more significant, there is a kind of almost native sycophancy peculiar to some races, begotten of ages of regulation and regimentation. The Germans have always been more or less the victims of an omnipresent sense of *Verboten*.

Perhaps something of the initial impulse in this direction came from the philosophy of Hegel, although there were beginning signs of a resurrection of Count Gobineau’s racial selection. Hegel made the state the supreme deity—to be recognized, obeyed and worshipped. Hitler’s bible, *Mein Kampf*, is pretty well made up of references and extracts from this modern New

Testament. The Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the rise of Bismarck to leadership and power, with his Prussian temperament and his emphasis on a policy of "blood and iron," pretty well fastened the spirit of militaristic aggression and force on the new German Empire. With it was growing kind of philosophic and scientific skepticism fatal to anything like a higher apiritual idealism of the finer softening influences of a growing civilization.

The schools and Universities had already caught the poisonous infection, and the better class of the youth of Germany, those most likely to occupy positions of influence and leadership, were living in an atmosphere and being subjected to a continuous educational inculcation of the new barbarism under the guise of a modern gospel of freedom and progress. Two names seemed to be especially prominent in this propaganda. Treitschke, historian and politician, and Nietzsche, the apostle of Chauvinistic bravo—

Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time,
Blessed are the peacemakers.

But I say unto you, Blessed are the warmakers, for they shall
reign in the halls of Valhalla.

Stewart Chamberlain, turned German, wrote a book, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, and later on another, *The Aryan Outlook*. The Emperor, William II read Chamberlain's *Foundations* assiduously and drew from it the inspiration for some of the headiest rodomantade. Chamberlain probably did most in later years to build up the German "suppermannish concert that prepared the way for the Great War." Hitler got a great many of his political precepts and his Aryan race ideal from Chamberlain. Just previous to the war of 1914, Count Bernhardi, who had been or was German Minister to the United States, wrote and published a little volume proving that war was a biological necessity in national experience, for the proper development of its manhood and womanhood and the elimination of the weakling and unfit. If one were at all inclined to be fatalistic in one's philosophy, it looks almost like an iron chain of causality all the way along.

The war of 1914 showed that Germany was not quite ready for the master stroke that was to put her on top of the world. The exile at Doorn was all that the Kaiser got out of his long firebreathing and sabrerattling and the submission of his fortune to the arbitration of war. Hitler became the heir

of all this mental and material preparation, the master of a Germany stimulated to the highest possible degree of enthusiastic fanaticism and a supreme conviction as to its own destiny, and in the pursuit of that destiny—its invincibility. Its only remained for him to do two things to make the world-vision complete, which he proceeded to do with the usual Germanic persistence and thoroughness.

One was to enlist and organize and educate the young people so that the coming generation which he would need would be filled with his own fanaticism and zeal. Anyone who saw the news reels of the moving pictures of that work at the time can give testimony of how well it was done, although not much attention was paid to it from the outside. A friend of mine, a buyer for one of the larger departmental stores, in one of his visits to Germany, before the war, met a young German woman—attractive personally, well educated—secretary to the head executive of a big German business. They were married just prior to the war. Three years afterwards they were at a dinner party. Some one without thinking—likely unconsciously—made derogatory reference to Hitler. Immediately a passionate protest and a spirited defence. Three years in this country—knowing it was not likely to advance her husband's interests, and yet a burning loyalty and devotion. The attachment and faith in their leader of those who were taken prisoner and their contempt towards their captors provided ample evidence of the same thing. Filled with a mystical and frenzied fanaticism alike, oblivious to other suffering, loss or death. The other point of preparation was the building up, training and perfecting of the most complete war machine and a gigantic assembling of the latest and most improved war material such as probably the world had never seen before.

This is the Germany that will appear before the peace table. She must be there, and she must be prepared to accept and to cooperate in whatever is thought necessary for future world security and world peace. Will the humiliation, and the suffering, and the loss be enough to bring her there in that chastened and humble spirit which alone would make her acceptance and co-operation worth while? Nothing else would be sufficient. Is it possible? Can it be done? That is the task and the master problem confronting those charged not only with the reconstruction of a shattered world but the redemption of a broken Germany as well.

Psychologists tell us how history shows that it takes at

least three generations—maybe more when these have been strongly held—to effect any real and lasting change in the ideals and thinking of a people. Who is to say—even if there were a sincere sorrow for what has been done and its terrible consequences—a sincere spirit of repentance and reparation—that with the native temperament, so much in evidence, the intensive and prolonged cultivation of the past, the beginning impetus of the new found and newly professed faith would be sufficient to sustain and carry it through—not only the generation professing—but those that are to follow—necessary if the profession is to be any good? And who will be the leaders and educators? They must come from themselves. Is a proud and high spirited people, after years of false and selfish stimulation and boasting, likely to submit easily to such a long, and painful, and humiliating process?