

THE NOVEL.

Forerunners, Major and Minor, of the Modern Romancer.

The celebration of the bi-centenary of Henry Fielding has recently led many a literary theorist to discuss with relish that well worn theme—the founding of the modern novel. It is an interesting and even an exciting game. You start with the assumption that if Fielding did not precisely invent the literary form in ques-



IBSEN. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)

in the world. As regards everything else, philosophy, purpose, ideals of form, or art, they differ from one another as men of different languages differ from one another. They survive in proportion as they are sincerely concerned with simple human things. Nobody reads the "Gesta Romanorum," it is true, save the student who rambles that way, or an occasional youngster browsing in the library. But no one could imagine the book's dying, for the tales in it have their roots, after all, in human experience. One does not need to read the moralizing postscripts; the fable always stands by itself, firm fixed in the immortal instincts of man. So, too, in the other early collection we have noted, golden tongued romance works its will upon us. "Reynard the Fox" can never grow old fashioned. The thing is too spontaneous, too naïve, for that.

It is interesting to note how, as time wears on and fiction becomes more self-conscious, it is successful, preserving its vitality through the years, as the author maintains not only sincerity but gusto. It is interesting to note, also—though, to be sure, it goes without saying—how the secret of the whole business lies in the heart of genius and nowhere else. Formulae are worthless; it is the inspiration that counts. We pick up two more volumes in this series, "The Decameron" and the book modelled upon it, Queen Marguerite's "Heptameron." Not all the changes of taste that time has wrought, not all our repugnance where the grossness of the Italian is concerned, can blind us to his greatness or to the charm of his novels. How human they are! With what incomparable spirit and truth and humor are those old narratives set forth! The prologue to "The Heptameron" tells us what the French thought of "those Hundred Novels of Boccaccio." "These did King Francis, first of his name," the story runs, "his Highness the Dauphin, the princess his wife, and my Lady Margaret of Navarre, esteem at such a price that if old Boccaccio could have heard them, through the praises of such mighty folk, well-nigh brought to life again." But without Boccaccio's genius it was impossible to make "The Heptameron" much more than a clever imita-

tion, he at least fixed its character in all essentials, giving it a coherence unknown to its predecessors. So far so good. Trouble begins when you try to work out a kind of evolutionary process, starting with the oldest folk tales and finding in "Tom Jones" a point of culmination. "The stuff is there," you say, looking at the fiction of the ages. "Of course it forms a natural sequence, which it should be the simplest thing in the world to exhibit in course of growth." Well, it is not by any means the simplest thing in the world to do this thing. Grave historians have tried it, but with doubtful success. On the whole, it is wiser to let the sequential idea alone in dealing with the development of fiction; or at most to keep it in the background, as a source of amusing and occasionally useful suggestion. In other words, bits of the chain may sometimes be plausibly enough linked together. To endeavor to forge a long succession of unbroken links is to court certain discomfiture.

Obviously, we have no intention, apropos of Fielding or any one else, of dogmatizing about the evolution of the modern novel. On the contrary, the foregoing reflections have been invited by the publication of a series of reprints which only serve to remind us once more of the purely personal, and even whimsical, manner in which the art of fiction has got itself developed. This series, published by the Duttons, is called "The Library of Early Novelists." We have received eleven of the volumes thus far published in it, and it is a curious collection that they make. At one end of the row stand the "Gesta Romanorum" and the "Early English Prose Romances" assembled by Thomes. At the other end is "The Monk," that amazing romance of Lewis's, which had so tremendous a vogue in the late Georgian epoch, but is now as dead as nail in door. He would be a darling man who attempted to press very far the points of contact among these many romances. There are but two elements which the major and minor forerunners of the modern novelist share in common. They all love just to spin a yarn, and they all have a conviction that human nature is the most interesting thing



MOMMSEN. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)



TOLSTOY. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)

tion. It is a classic, but it is a minor one; the old fire is lacking.

It seems a little odd to meet "Gulliver" in this gallery. No doubt it belongs in a "Library of Early Novelists," yet its peculiar character, and especially its satirical wit, give it a place apart. Its underlying gravity, too, detaches it from the sphere of fiction in the ordinary sense. It enforces, we may note in passing, the point made above as to the impossibility of arranging all the masterpieces of fiction in a sequence. What relation has Gulliver to the modern novel as we customarily understand it? The introduction to the volume containing Defoe's "Moll Flanders" and "Roxana" has some droll passages. The author, Mr. E. A. Baker, attributing to Defoe the invention of the Naturalist novel, draws a parallel between "Moll Flanders" and Octave Mirbeau's "Journal d'une Femme de Chambre." There is something in the comparison, but not half so much as Mr. Baker imagines. After demonstrating, easily enough, that some of Defoe's characteristics reproduce themselves in M. Mirbeau, Mr. Baker asserts that these prove the latter the lineal successor of the Englishman, and then he blandly adds: "It is to some extent a confirmation of this view, that one of the most successful books in France at the time when interest in the works of the Naturalist school was particularly absorbing, should be Marcel Schwob's translation of 'Moll Flanders.'" This is a capital illustration of the airy modern manner of bolstering up a case, when you have one on your hands and simply must prove it.

Is "John Bunce" still readable? Hazlitt, Mr. Baker recalls, could read the book, but Hazlitt was an uncommonly courageous soul. As a matter of fact, "John Bunce" is a colossal bore. So, we fear, is "The Fool of Quality," despite Charles Kingsley's enthusiasm for it. It is readable in patches, but to go through the long tale to the bitter end is a thing that, as the saying goes, "would take a lot of doing." Wieland's "Don Sylvio de Rosalva" is another of these queer old lotteries, from which you may draw out a plum now and then, if you do not mind enduring, for the sake of it, solid quantities of sheer tedium. The case of Mrs. Aphra Behn is a little baffling. She was a sprightly lady, and in her plays and novels she had her

entertaining moments. Nevertheless, "The Royal Slave," "Agnes de Castro," "The Fair Jilt" and the rest, are, when all is said, rather preposterous affairs. Curiosity may beguile us in their direction, but it is inconceivable that any human creature could ever read one of the stories twice. We doubt if we could read "The Monk" a second time, but, on the other hand, we should be sorry for the wight who could not extract a certain amount of fun from this tissue of fustian, especially if it is taken up after the reader has made the acquaintance of Lewis's diverting personality and history. This is the sort of thing that you find in "The Monk":

I heard him approach a small cupboard which was fixed up in a distant part of the room, and unlock it. At this moment I felt myself shaken gently. "Now! now!" whispered Marguerite. I opened my eyes. Baptiste stood with his back towards me. No one else was in the room save Marguerite and the sleeping lady. The villain had taken a dagger from the cupboard, and seemed examining whether it was sufficiently sharp. I had neglected to furnish myself with arms, but I perceived this to be my only chance of escaping, and resolved not to lose the opportunity. I sprang from my seat, darted suddenly upon Baptiste, and claspng my hands round his throat pressed it so forcibly as to prevent his uttering a single cry. You may remember that I was remarkable at Salamanca for the power of my arm. It now rendered me an essential service. Surprised, terrified and breathless, the villain was by no means an equal antagonist. I threw him upon the ground; I grasped him still tighter; and, while I fixed him without motion upon the floor, Marguerite, wresting the dagger from his hand, plunged it repeatedly in his heart till he expired.

No sooner was this horrible but necessary act perpetrated than Marguerite called on me to follow her.

"Flight is our only refuge," said she; "quick, quick! Away!"

I hesitated not to obey her; but, unwilling to leave the baroness a victim of the vengeance of the robbers, I raised her in my arms still sleeping, and hastened after Marguerite. The horses of the banditti were fastened near the door. My conductress sprang upon one of them. I followed her example, placed the baroness before me, and spurred on my horse. Our only hope was to reach Strasburg, which was much nearer than the perfidious Claude had assured me. Marguerite was well acquainted with the road, and galloped on before me. We were obliged to pass by the barn, where the robbers were slaughtering our domestics. The door was open; we distinguished the shrieks of the dying, and imprecations of the murderers. What I felt at that moment language is unable to describe.

There are heaps of things in "The Monk" which "language is unable to describe," and



D'ANNUNZIO. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)

Lewis's heroic effort to find the fit words makes a joyous spectacle. Decidedly it would be unwise to talk about the debt that modern fiction owes to this one of the forerunners. But, we repeat, it is not the question of indebtedness that will concern the judicious reader when he goes back to the old novelists. He will read them, when they are good, or dip into them when they are bad or merely indifferent, simply for the sake of what each one has to offer, and he will leave the solemnities of literary history to take care of themselves.

OLAF GULBRANSSON.

His Caricatures of Certain European Celebrities.

In the Parisian journal, "L'Art et les Artistes," M. R. A. Meyer has recently published some interesting notes on German caricature. His pages are illustrated with examples of the work of Olaf Gulbransson, some of which we reproduce. This artist is credited by M. Meyer with much of the success of "Simplicissimus," the paper which, from the publication of its first number, some twelve years ago, has been indispensable to those Germans who love to see fun poked at the existing order of things. Incidentally, Gulbransson and his colleagues have given their satire an artistic significance.

This draftsman, as M. Meyer points out, has been influenced by Japanese art, and he has sought to make his sketches rhythmic in line, harmonious as to the arrangement of blacks and whites, and, above all things, decorative in effect. His work is not, perhaps, quite as enchanting as his Parisian critic finds it, but there is no denying its humor or its technical cleverness. His caricatures of Ibsen, D'Annunzio, Tolstoy, Gorky and others are as skilfully drawn as they are amusingly conceived. Especially admirable is the simplicity to be noted in these drawings. They are produced with the utmost economy of line, yet so expressive is every touch that the broad result fairly brims over with meaning.

Mrs. Elinor Glyn, the author of that amusing book, "The Visits of Elizabeth," has written a new story entitled "Three Weeks."

LITERARY NOTES.

Mr. Walter Jerrold's biography of Thomas Hood is nearly ready for publication. He has discovered a good deal of hitherto unnoticed material about Hood's earlier life in London, and has used a number of fresh letters. He has also found some interesting relics of Hood's professional practice as an engraver.

A forthcoming work which will make a vivid appeal to those interested in eighteenth century life in New England is a handsome new edition of Wilkins Updike's "History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett, Rhode Island." The book was originally issued in 1847, and has long been a much sought for bibliographical rarity. The publisher, Mr. D. B. Updike, of Boston, a grandson of the author, has been collecting



GEORG BRANDES. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)

for some years, we are told, a great mass of documents, books, pamphlets and other publications illustrative of the period and the locality treated in the book, and all these have been skilfully used by the editor, the Rev. Daniel Goodwin, former rector of the old Narragansett Church and editor of "The Maccabean Diary." Amid the wealth of new material are additional facts concerning Dean Berkeley and his Newport friends introduced into the "Minute Philosopher," and a suggestion as to the probable residence in Providence of David Yale, the father of Elihu. The edition is to contain a remarkable collection of fifty full page reproductions of old portraits by Copley, Stuart, Laurence, Smibert, Malbone and other notable artists of the eighteenth century. About two-thirds of these portraits of men and women of station in the colony have never been reproduced before. To these eminently valuable illustrations have been added a number of views of Narragansett landmarks, maps and facsimiles.

Many are the variants of the famous warning to the stealers of books. Here is an old one from Scotland: "He yat stelis yis Buik fra Me, god gif he be hangit one ane tre. Amen for me, amen for the [thee], amen for all good company. Teste manu propria."

He who read with indignation, not long ago, Tolstoy's wholesale condemnation of Shakespeare and his works may be soothed in the contemplation of this passage from Professor Walter Raleigh's just issued biography of the poet in the English Men of Letters series:

So Shakespeare has come to his own, as an English man of letters; he has been separated from his fellows, and recognized for what he is: perhaps the greatest poet of all time; one who has said more about humanity than any other writer, and has said it better; whose works are the study and admiration of divines and philosophers, of soldiers and statesmen, so that his continued vogue upon the stage is the smallest part of his immortality; who has touched many spirits finely to fine issues, and has been for three centuries a source of delight and understanding, of wisdom and consolation.

M. Paul Bourget, in his new novel, "L'Emigré," brings into the workings of his plot the current controversy in France between Church and State. The "Emigré" is a delightful nobleman of the old school of reactionary views, and trouble looms in the prospect that his son, an officer of dragoons, will soon be employed with his troops in protecting the officials who have to make inventories at churches. The marquis, moreover, wants his son to marry money for the sake of the ancestral estate, whereas the young man is in love with a charming bourgeoisie. The novelist will, no doubt, drag his agreeable hero and heroine unscathed out of these complications.



MAXIM GORKY. (From the caricature by Gulbransson.)