

Foreign Books

Continued from Preceding Page.

the author of many books, the best known of which is "Einstein: Einblick in Seine Gedankenwelt" ("Einstein: How He Thinks"). Published last year, it has gone through forty-six editions. Moszkowski is one of Einstein's most intimate friends. The two have had many long talks together, during which the one explained the theory of relativity to the other. The Newton of 1922 has given his personal approval to this book.

Moszkowski has been a globe trotter in addition to a writer. About one year ago, he was again taken down with *wanderlust*, only to realize that his case was incurable, owing to the fact that what would have been considered a fortune in Unter den Linden eight years ago is at present only a few dollars in, say, Kansas. So Moszkowski saw that he would have to stay at home. This inspired him with the idea of writing this book, in which he visits, in his imagination, islands that have never been visited before. Quantitatively it is a big book he has written; and, for the individual who can endure a riot of phantasies, it is also a big book qualitatively.

When he discussed his plan with his friends, including Albert Einstein, they discouraged him; they told him that this was a rather worn theme; that Marco Polo and Columbus and Vasco da Gama and Nordenskjöld and Sven Hedin had done at first hand what he was planning to do from his study. This left him undismayed. He remarked that there were but two names that gave him pause—Rabelais and Swift. This moved his publisher, Fontane of Berlin, and certainly not a mean one, to state on the jacket that the book is far superior to "Gulliver's Travels," while it makes anything Pantagruel said sound jejune and insipid.

Well, Moszkowski has at least written a remarkable book. He has boarded the good ship "Atalanta" and visited the Platonic Islands, the Islands of Happy Conditions, the Retrogressive Islands, the Islands of the Pacifists, of the Liberal Arts, and so on and on, around a world that does not exist and over seas of his own making. Returned home, he concludes, following Nostradamus before him, that there is not a single principle formulated by man that will stand the test if adequately tried out. Relativity again!

Let us make a confession: There are 283 tall pages in the book. Printed after American usage, it would make a volume of about 400 pages. The copy placed at my disposal was uncut. For reasons that concern no one but me, I was obliged to read as much of it as I could without cutting the leaves, I read nothing, in this way, that was not provocative, revolutionary and yet relatively compelling. Moszkowski has made a bold attempt to overthrow the prevailing opinion, and when a mind of his type sets itself a task like that he rarely fails to be interesting.

The fate of the book I shall not attempt to predict. I shall only say that "Gulliver's Travels" is at least tame in comparison with it, and that Moszkowski has a special copyright on it which makes quotation illegal.

And now for the reverse side—the face side—of the medal. Germany is and always has been a land of contradictions; the Germans as individuals are Hydes and Jekylls. Richard Wagner, for example, was in a way a man of great saintliness of character, of well nigh unctuous spirituality, and then, in a way, he was not. He

was the author, in other words, of the first and third acts of "Parsifal," and also the author of the second act of "Parsifal."

It is an unqualified pleasure to note just two books which are also self-revealing, but from a different angle: Gabriele Reuter's "Von Kindheit zum Menschen" ("The Story of My Youth") and Professor Friedrich von der Leyen's "Deutsche Dichtung in Neuer Zeit" ("A History of German Literature since 1900"). This one is the autobiography of a great woman writer, the other a reasoned, disciplined and successful attempt to evaluate contemporary German thoughts.

Twenty-five years ago, when the men of Germany were giving a poor account of themselves in letters, four women published virtually their first novels: Ricarda Huch, Isolde Kurz, Helene Bohlau and Gabriele Reuter. The latter's work was entitled "Aus guter Familie" ("Of Good Family"). Gabriele Reuter took up the question of the German girl, of the German woman, who has to, or at least wishes to, make her own way. It was, it is, one of the outstanding novels of Europe. This splendid autobiography contains the background of which the novel grew. I read it years ago; and I have read about it. But now I feel that I understand it. And, incidentally, Gabriele Reuter tells us that she had first called it "Agathe Heidling," the name of her heroine, but John Henry Mackay persuaded her to change the title to "Of Good Family." It was also Mackay who read the work in manuscript and persuaded S. Fischer of Berlin to publish it.

But this is told in only a small chapter in this book of 476 wholesome pages. Gabriele Reuter—she came from the same Pomerania that produced the *Plattdeutsch* humorist Fritz Reuter though the two are in no way related—knew Ibsen and Nietzsche and Paul Heyse personally, she has known indeed everybody in Continental Europe personally that is worth knowing, and in the pages of this delectable self-revelation she has set down her impressions. If her creative works had ever been made accessible to English readers, how this autobiography would enlighten and refresh, stimulate and educate our own women writers! And it might give even our men writers something to ponder over.

Of the many attempts to bring order into the chaos of German letters during the last two decades, Von der Leyen's is easily the one to be recommended if the recommendation is to be a service and not a puff. As books are printed in this country, it would make about 500 pages. There are no illustrations, very few biographical data—those have been given by Bartels and can be given by any one—and, unfortunately, no index. To offset this, there are no delusions. Von der Leyen had to overcome one supreme doubt before he could make up his mind to write this book: "Is modern German literature worth the years of study a book of this kind makes obligatory?" He decided that it is. And then he set himself a threefold task: the weighing of German literature for its own sake and as judged by its own standards, as viewed by its enemies, and as a visualization of the two decades it covers. To accomplish this task he found it necessary to pay considerable attention to non-German writers; to explain a number of high sounding movements; to devote special chapters to four leaders: Nietzsche, Stefan George, Richard Dehmel and Hauptmann; to omit much, condemn much, and laud much. And when he is about through he says that "German literature is not quite so chaotic, impenetrable, anarchistic and confused as it seems." This is true, provided you have mastered Von der Leyen.

What a boon to our own readers, and those of Great Britain, an adequate translation of the work would be! It celebrates a great literature, for it celebrates European literature. It contains monumental paragraphs on writers of great merit whose names have never been mentioned in the English speaking world. And this suggests the gravest defect in our study of foreign literatures. By some odd chance we take up with a few isolated individuals, come to feel that they represent all that is good, and remain deaf and blind to the others, and dumb about them. This should be corrected. We might begin, too, with the women; we might begin by admitting that not every word of Selma Lagerlöf is oracular, and by at least trying to fancy that Gabriele Reuter also has some gifts.

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