

Literary page

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LITERARY PAGE

Edited by Dr. PAUL LANG.

All letters containing criticisms, suggestions, questions, &c., with regard to this page should be addressed to the "Literary Editor."

RAMUZ, THE MYSTIC.

You probably know of C. F. Ramuz. You have very likely heard of his early novels, his "Aimé Pache" for instance, in which he depicts a man from the Canton de Vaud who went to Paris to become a painter, but could not adapt himself to these surroundings. Only when he returned to his beloved Canton de Vaud and made a portrait of his friend, who was a dragoon, did he find his true style. Since he wrote this glorification of the power of one's native soil, Ramuz has dealt again and again with life and death on the northern shore of Lac Léman. He has "soaked" himself more and more in the atmosphere of his incomparable region, has become deeper and deeper rooted in what is to him the centre of the world. One knows that, as he foresaid in his pamphlet "Raison d'être," he has contrived to form a style which, highly artificial as it is, has incorporated strange and original expressions of the vernacular.

But whilst in the past he wrote novels about people who lived and with whom we suffer, the mysterious powers of nature, not only of the world, but of the universe, are what push the action in his later books forward. Although we hear of men, women and children, they are mere marionettes, driven by the will of their creator and without any inner life of their own. They are still seen with the eyes of the painter which Ramuz cannot forsake, but his mystic impulse is the one note through which his books now live. They are no longer novels, they are epics in poetic, rhythmic prose which you read as you read legends. Your delight will be all the greater if you do not seek anything other than what the writer intends to give you: Tales of mystical happenings.

In "Terre du Ciel" and "Présence de la Mort" (Georg & Cie., Geneva), his latest books, he has, in fact, burnt, so to speak, his last terrestrial ships. We are now in heaven and now on an earth which is destroyed by the approaching sun.

The time has come for French speaking Switzerland definitely to take stock of the fact that it, at last, possesses in C. F. Ramuz an artist who is an artist to his finger tips, who, moreover, has attained a depth and width of inspiration which entitles him to rank amongst the greatest authors of any country. If it is the characteristic of the great writer that he is able to create a universe of his own, Time and Space being no hindrance to him, C. F. Ramuz is the writer with whom the literature of French speaking Switzerland comes into its own. Hitherto it has been handicapped, as we all know, because of its renowned writers

being either not wholly and consciously French-Swiss, or being not wholly writers. Ramuz is the man who, although an eminent artist who persists in listening to the inner voice as consciously and faithfully as does Spitteler, yet has lifted up the peasant of the Canton de Vaud into a magical world, unknown and undreamt of in the past. Ramuz, having nothing in common with Geneva, their critics will naturally not admit him to be representative of the whole of French speaking Switzerland. They must suffice themselves there with Henry Spiess, a very good second, it is true. One of their allegations against the Vaudois genius is, however, not without foundation. The vocabulary and the visible world of Ramuz is comparatively restricted. And yet, one might ask: Is not everything so in our country, above all, is it not the typical outlook of those amongst whom he lives? There is, too, in his work their sincere love of the beauty of the static conditions of life, their delight in seeing things, their intimate contact with nature, their mysticism. Davel, the political mystic, whom we celebrate now, is another offspring from this soil.

Those who care at all for the inner melody of Ramuz' language—and this is probably not a matter of argument, but one entirely of feeling—will praise his two new books which are born out of an identical state of mind and in which the same elements produce similar effects. In both books there is a movement of preparation which makes up the first half, in which the "Thing" comes nearer and nearer. In the second half you have the catastrophe pictured in detail right up to the conclusion, which in both books is a somewhat reconciling one. "Terre du Ciel" reveals a typical Ramuz world of mute lovers, old women who care for nothing but their old-fashioned, small interests, and brave craftsmen. Only instead of sitting in a Vaudois village, they sit in heaven. They carry on there much the same life as they did before, except that all is now gentleness and kindness. The hawk gives his things away instead of selling them, and the women, instead of denouncing one another, help one another. We are shown in detail how this transformation has worked amongst different people and how peacefully their life goes on until one day a goatherd finds out that high up in the mountain there is some way into another world, that there is something behind, and how thereafter the people of that heavenly village for the first time become tired of eternal bliss. Their minds become restless, we feel: something terrible will happen. One day the hunter even overhears from behind the rock the goatherd scolding a goat who had gone too far and reminding him of another goat which had disappeared entirely. When he heard that, says Ramuz, "son coeur faisait un "bruit comme quand on tapotte avec le doigt un "tonneau vide," and from that moment onward peace was forfeited. A few days afterwards a

huge cloud of smoke emerged from the top of the mountain. Groups were formed, discussing the event, and a great anxiety spread its dark wings. More smoke came out, and then something dreadful happened. The hunter came to say that he had disturbed the "people behind the mountain," that they had seen him and that they were running after him close on his heels. A flight began, the earth shook, and now the mouth of the mountain opened and threw out poor mortals—mortals with all their hatred, their greed and their violence. The burghers of the heavenly village had to stand their uncanny looks. Suddenly, however, the mortals did not move any further. They destroyed themselves before their heavenly spectators, and then "la grande gorge s'avance comme une machoire "et les replit." Now only the heavenly village realised what beatitude meant. It cherished it carefully henceforth, because the threat of another life hung continuously over it. They knew now that they were not safe, that the mountain was always ready to open its mouth again and to throw forth violence and greed and passion. They knew now that they could only enjoy this bliss whilst for ever thinking of the damnation lurking behind the mountain.

"Presence de la Mort," the second book, is of a gloomier character. It is a story of how the warmth of a certain summer increases and increases until people realise that the end of the world is ahead and that the sun is approaching at a great pace. The first of such news which appears in the press is accepted by the simple people of Ramuz's world with great incredulity. A little talk arises on the topic here and there, but is soon dropped. Yet, the warmth increases, and now there can be no more doubt about the appalling truth. People flock towards the lake, which becomes drier and drier and of an unsavoury colour. Those villagers who are in its neighbourhood form themselves into self-sufficient communities and shoot everybody coming their way.

The last part of the book takes us up into the mountains, where we watch a terrible struggle between the exasperated people of the midlands and the mountaineers for the possession of these regions which alone are supportable at all. All life is now extinguished in the towns. A lonely aviator tries a mad escape, but falls down soon with his machine burnt. Mysteriously one single village high up in the mountains, the inhabitants of which are of a pious character, escapes the supreme sacrifice. These humble and devout people enter directly into eternal bliss.

Sprichwörter.

Wo's Bruch ist, leit me d'Chue is Bett.

's Gelt macht de Markt, nid d' Lüt.

Wer geng chrachet, bricht nit; wer geng brestet, stirbt nit.

DER PARK.

Wir alle haben an dir Anteil,
Grünes Herz.
Du, aller geknickter Grosstadtmenchen
Aufrichtende Ruhe,
Mattgehetzer Herzen, fiebender Augen
Taufisches Labsal.
Du, Befreiung Tausender,
Die sich verloren im Steingewirr,
Zu Licht und Sonne.
Du, Wiedergeburt,
Mildes Gottesgeschenke,
Geburtsstätt freier Gedanken,
Ganzer Ieinerder Arbeiterheere,
Allsonntägliche Auferstehung!

ARTHUR MANUEL.

Das obenstehende Bild ist einem ersten Bändchen "Gedichte" des im Norden Englands lebenden Autors — eines Zürchers — entnommen. Wir werden auf den erfreulichen Erstling in einer der nächsten Nummern zurückkommen.

GENEVE MYSTIFIEE.

Les Vaudois ont leur Ramuz, mais les Genevois ont leur Georges Oltramare. Cet écrivain versatile vient de publier déjà le deuxième mille d'une petite plaquette "Les Mystères de Genève" (Editions A. Ciana) qui, paraît-il, inquiète pas mal la ville de Calvin. Et pour cause! La plaisanterie ci-dessous que nous en tirons est une des plus anodines de cette collection épicée. Nous en reparlerons sous peu.

A LA DEGRINGOLADE.

Lettre d'un délégué chinois à son ami Ki-San-Fouh.
Genève, 10 novembre 1922.

Ami très cher,
Me voilà dans la capitale du monde. C'est une jolie petite ville. Le vent très rude y tord curieusement les cheminées.

Je flâne tout le jour en attendant que se décide le sort des peuples. Les rues ici ne sont pas longues, mais les tramways se déplacent avec une extraordinaire lenteur: on n'en use que pour faire la conversation.

J'ai déjà vu le Collège, le Général Dufour, les Réformateurs, et aussi la rue des Granges, qui a, paraît-il, un bon et un mauvais côté, comme toutes les choses humaines. C'est là qu'habitent les patriens, financiers habiles et zélés protestants.

Ce qui m'a le plus frappé, c'est le nombre prodigieux des banques. Il y a plus de banques à Genève que de mosquées à Constantinople ou de pagodes chez nous. Quelle religion nouvelle fit bâtir tous ces temples? Est-ce parce que le franc suisse a monté sans cesse pendant la guerre qu'on le confondrait avec le Très-Haut?

Les Genevois mettent beaucoup d'empressement à vous dire qu'ils sont d'un abord hargneux. Avec mille politesses il vous expliquent leur mauvais caractère. Je les crois plutôt moroses, timides, méfiants, et toujours prêts à se plaindre de certaines difficultés qu'ils appellent, je ne sais pourquoi, des "chinoiseries."

On peut douter de l'avenir d'une race aussi étrange. Les héritiers des anciennes familles accomplissent ici des besognes modestes, ouvrent des bureaux, exploitent des garages. Tel arrière-neveu d'un médecin illustre préside aux destinées d'une petite famille sportive. Tel fils de ministre dirige des cinémas; tandis que le père, chargé d'honneurs, vêtu de la redingote, coiffé du haut-de-forme, aux acclamations de la foule, apparaît sur l'écran, l'enfant court à la caisse empocher la recette.

Et que dire de la progéniture des pasteurs huguenots sinon qu'elle tourne à leur confusion? La fatalité a voulu que ces dignes ecclésiastiques n'engendrent que des vauriens.

Un Genevois riche, au sortir du collège, dépose ordinairement un million dans une banque, laquelle l'engage comme employé à cent cinquante francs par mois. L'on se demande, à voir ces blêmes éphèbes derrière leur guichet, non pas de qui ils peuvent bien descendre mais d'où ils dégringolent...

Chaque matin et chaque soir bénissons le ciel, Ki-San-Fouh, de nous avoir fait naître en Chine. J'appelle sur votre tête la bonté de Confucius.

PING-PONG.

FOR THE TICINESI.

The collection of Swiss dialect poems "Schwyzerländli," which the Lesezirkel Hottingen published in 1915, contains a delicious Tessin poem which we print below for the benefit of our Tessin compatriots in London. They will enjoy it—Mr. Gatti will most certainly do so. Could the poet honestly say of all wealthy people in London, as he says of the Gattis, that they have acquired their riches "col valor di sò man e del sò coo"?

L'EMIGRANT TICINESI.

Ciao, nè pà, e ti, mama, amò un basin!
Stee sü franch per sti ann che mi sont via,
Tornerò, se Dio vör, al mè destin,
A portav l'abondanza e l'alegrìa.

Passarò dal Campans di pover vecc,
Dova i riposan strach de tant lavor,
Che dirò: arivedess — cont el cör strecc,
E che un quai di vöri dormi con lor.

Salüdém la Rosin, disigh la 'm scriva,
Mi lavori, al savii anca per lee,
A speri ben de rivedéla viva,
Mama, gardegh un pò, femm el piasee. —

Dova 'l va? Forse de l'Art la stela
La gha lüs in la ment: Roma, Milan,
Firenze el ciaman, come un di el Vela,
O come el Ciser, onor di nost montagn?

O l'è Paris immens, o l'è Lion,
O Londra, dove i Gatt d' la val del soo
Han podüü guadagnà paricc milion
Col valor di sò man e del sò coo?

O j'è i ranc sterminaa de Stad Unii,
Dell' Argentina, i riv del Paraná,
Dove tanti povritt inn ben riccii
Col mung i vacch a tornà sciori a cà?

O l'Australia, la 'l ciaman in fond ai minn
A cavà l'or, o in la sabia di fiüm,
Dova l'a üsaa la sapa anca el Respin,
Che torna a cà l'a dii: Comandum nün!

Col capell fö di öcc e cascìa indree,
Al Brissagh pizz in boca, e al sguard scür,
Col so pass risolut da montagna,
Gh' é nessim che d'intorn ghe faga scür.

E l'eco del salut de l'emigrant,
Al rispönd ancamb, giü, de lontan,
El fiüm e' l canta e' l cor, a lü cantand
Al ghe va dree per guadagnass el pan.

El Ticines el gh'a dovert el mond;
El va viv e spedi, ma semper ciar,
Come i sò fiüm el lassa vedé 'l fond;
Ma, mej di fiüm, el torna indree dal mar!
ELIGIO POMETTA.