

A LETTER FROM GERMANY

MUNICH, April, 1930.

THE EDITOR reminds me that it is a long time since I sent in my usual account of German literature. It may sound paradoxical to excuse the time that has elapsed by saying that, in spite of the noise made by a crowd of literati who increase each day, literature in the old sense hardly exists in Germany. But literature is created only when individuals' impulses are submitted to a definite and common order; it needs some universally acknowledged standard such as existed in the time of Goethe and Schiller. Both of these were copied, more or less successfully, by the rising generation—if they did not try to prove that these idols ought to be overthrown and their own particular idea enthroned instead. Holderlin and Kleist both said so. Kleist boasted; "I will take the wreath from his brow." But Schiller, more sensible than Holderlin or Kleist, in time adapted his genius to that of Goethe. German romanticism, which had grown up revering the master, also submitted to his reign of terror. As they did not dispute his power, he acknowledged them—though with some hesitation—and even put up with their love for Spain.

The so-called "Young Germany" of Gutzkow and Heine also kept its literary impertinence bridled, although in politics they were in favour of revolution. It was only the so-called "Youngest Germany" who thought themselves strong enough to be no longer descendants of the great, but founders of a new order of things. Arno Holz was their pioneer. In 1882, while not yet twenty years old, he gave the signal to revolt against that tradition (in which the bold Prussian himself had grown up). He began quite mildly, and as he himself smilingly said later on, he was "still quite charmed with every line that tinkled like cow-bells." Soon after, an unheard-of voice arose in Austria, which had formerly always been rather conservative in matters of art; Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Yesterday* was published in 1891. The poet was not yet twenty.

Holz's influence founded the firm of publishers—S. Fischer. Holz created the beloved Johannes Schlaf, he created Gerhart Hauptmann, he created Brahms. It is true that he generally quarrelled with the people he had made; dictators are always unpopular to begin with; but Hofmannsthal charmed, and therein lay his power. These two created a form, each of them his own, but large enough at the same time to be adapted to genuine genius. It lasted till the war broke out. But the young men who came back from the war had lost in the trenches the form to which they had been accustomed and this loss of a sure tradition has not yet been replaced. We hardly notice it, solely because there are still a number of writers working, whose originality had taken shape long before the war. The prominent poets of to-day belong to a past generation. Ludwig Fulda was born in 1862, the same year as Arthur Schnitzler; I followed in 1863, Hermann Stehr in 1864, Max Helbe in 1865, Richard Beer-Hofmann in 1866, Felix Salten in 1869, Enrietta von Handel-Mazzetti in 1867, Heinrich Mann in 1871, Alfred Monbert in 1872, Jakob Wassermann in 1873, Wilhelm von Scholz in 1874, Thomas Mann in 1875, Raoul Aurnheimer in 1876, Hermann Hesse in 1877, Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer in 1878, Walter von Molo in 1880, Stefan Zweig and Anton Wilgans in 1880, Rene Schickele in 1883, Hans Brandenburg in 1885, and Franz Werfel in 1890. The present time is therefore still dominated by writers who are no longer in their first youth, to put it mildly. Readers don't notice it, because the majority of them also belong, with us, to that ageing generation. But what do we offer to youth, who ordinarily would be now setting the fashion? Or have these young people no need whatever for spiritual sustenance?

The attention is attracted by the great success of the poems of Paula Grogger and
 Karl Schumann. The former lives in Düsseldorf, a resident of considerable power,
 and occupies the position her brother took. The latter, the younger, and
 the Düsseldorf. Karl Schumann was born in Hamburg in 1845. His delight is
 with his industry and his great fame, as an author there in his *Zeitschriften*, but
 through the *Kultur* and the *Kunst* and the *Fach*, which better reminds us of St.
 Petersburg. Among the main writers, Konradt Wagner alone is on their level. He was
 born in Karlsruhe in 1845 and had given signs of great talent in his *Journal*; he has
 now written a masterpiece in his *Nachrichten*, which is a guarantee for still more in the
 future. We hope that numerous works of this great beginning will not fail to appear.
 We wish this beginning shall not be able to speak of literature in the old sense in the
 language of today.

HEINRICH LAUBE