

# A LETTER FROM GERMANY

Munich.

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER'S sixtieth birthday was celebrated in German theatres by performances of his plays and in the newspapers by friendly appreciations. Admiration was almost always mingled with a sort of sadness—almost as though obituary notices were written rather than congratulations. The *Neue Rundschau* in Berlin, the organ of his loyal publisher, S. Fischer, and the *Moderne Welt* of Vienna issued "Schnitzler numbers." They opened their pages to his friends and fellow-workers, that on this anniversary they might express their appreciation. Hardly a single one of the famous German names was lacking, but among these good wishes too, a melancholy note was characteristic. Everyone was sincere and glad, and yet there was a funereal air about the entire Schnitzler Festival. All of us hoped that he would remain working in our midst for many years to come in the best of health, but we also felt that Schnitzler's works are the expression of an epoch that is gone, irrevocably gone. For that very reason his works are so significant to us, even more so than when they were written. Then the world whose melancholy reflection they were was still in existence; few of us would have dreamed that we would survive it. But Schnitzler in some mysterious way anticipated the end even then. He, the physician by profession, saw the Hippocratic lines in the soft face of our amiable Austrian heedlessness. The charm of his plays as well as of his stories lies in their unforced gaiety. The Austrians retained this characteristic even when the other German tribes, one after another, were becoming self-complacent in a stiff, really quite un-German dignity. Vienna seemed the last German city which had not forgotten how to smile. And at that time the only complaint Vienna had to make of Schnitzler was that suddenly secret tears always mingled with his smile. For many years the critics of Vienna incessantly admonished him. His talent, they maintained, lay fundamentally in his lightheartedness, and yet in all his plays he suddenly allowed himself to be led astray by a serious or even a tragic note which was not his *forte* at all. For years Viennese criticism incessantly called upon him to write "the German comedy." This cry for "the German comedy" has long been one of the *bravura* "stunts" of German criticism. No matter how many comedies one may write, still it is never *the* mythical German comedy. How many a time after a *première* didn't Schnitzler complain of this! I recommended:

"Why not do them the favour? For once put aside your melancholy inclinations; it is usually in the third act that you suddenly can't resist them any longer!"

And to be sure, he came along after a couple of months when we met again, beaming:

"This time I am doing it. I am writing the piece for which you have been crying for years. There won't be a melancholy note in it; this time it will be the long desired German comedy!"

I wished him "good luck," and when we saw each other again after a few weeks my first question was:

"How is the German comedy getting on?"



He looked at me hesitatingly and said :  
 " I've been very busily at it ; I am already down at the last act, only, you know, unfortunately in the preceding act one of the characters committed suicide. There was no other way out."

And so it happened that up to the present day he has not yet written the much-wanted German comedy. But to-day we know that the dark shadows surrounding the Austrian lightheartedness of his characters were the most genuine part. Deep down Schnitzler knew, without admitting it to himself, that Vienna during the years from 1890 to the War already bore the kiss of death upon its brow. Vienna is still standing, the houses are still standing, but the Empire whose capital it was is gone. Vienna has become a fairy-tale without a country. Schnitzler always felt Vienna as a fairy-tale, even when we others were still thinking it was reality. This lends a charm to his works which will not fade, as long as any remembrance remains anywhere in the world of the old Imperial city on the Danube. After all, it always has been Austria's destiny to find its fulfilment only in art. In Mozart, Schubert, Brückner, Hugo Wolf, and Mahler is represented a reality beside which even the historical reality of Austria grows pale and sketchy. The life of Austria was perhaps always only a rehearsal for its works of art. It is thus that we few remaining Austrians whose Fatherland disappeared beneath our feet seek to comfort ourselves.

A very curious work on Johann Sebastian Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* which appeared first in extracts in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, has now been published in its entirety under the imprint of Georg Stilke of Berlin. It is arousing much attention, and on the one hand is praised quite as much as it is attacked on the other. Its author is Heinrich Sitte, the archæologist, of the University of Innsbruck. There has been much shaking of heads among the " experts." The professional musicians ask what title has an archæologist to enter a discussion about Bach, and the professional archæologists take the view that it is unseemly that one of their colleagues should be coquetting with Dame Music. Both sides had to be reminded that the famous Mozart authority, Otto Jahn, was also an archæologist by profession. Camillo Sitte, Heinrich's father, was both architect and teacher of art ; he organised the *Staatsgewerbeschule* of Vienna, and wrote the famous book on " City Building," which made an entire generation realise again that every proper square in a city, even every street corner, must be arranged according to definite laws, though, of course, unconsciously. Camillo Sitte's most intimate friend was Hans Richter, the Wagner conductor, and so young Heinrich grew up in the midst of both the plastic and musical arts. He was a thoroughly trained pianist, just about ready to appear in public for the first time, when finally he unexpectedly decided in favour of science. If Bach was the last word to him in music, so in archæology all his efforts were directed towards the frieze of the Parthenon. Phidias to him is for the eye what Bach is for the ear. He, as it were, regards the frieze of the Parthenon as a visible *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*. Or one might express it in this way : if one wanted to explain the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* to a deaf man, it would only be necessary to show him the frieze of the Parthenon. This new book about Bach arouses so much favourable and bitterly hostile comment, chiefly on account of the strange discovery which the author claims to have made concerning the real genesis of the *Chromatic Fantasy*. How did Bach come to it ? How did it occur to him ? What was the first thing to occur to him ? It occurred to him to compose his own name, and he discovered that everything went beautifully, as soon as he let his name become chromatic. After the *Fantasy* breaks down into chaos, the *Fugue* begins again bravely and confidently with *a, b, h, c*. As soon as one dechromatises *a, b, h, c*, the result is B a c h,



the composer's name. Bach himself, as we know from an eighteenth-century musical lexicon, was proud of his purely musical name. He introduces it in the *C sharp minor fugue* of the *Wohltemperiertes Klavier* and in the *Invention in F minor* for three voices. It is in the *Chromatic Fantasy*, however, that he first gives his name a triumphant transformation. He now makes the name with which he was born consciously his own in that he transposes the letters. He no longer merely accepts what he received at his birth, but out of *b a c h* he now makes *a b h c*. This means that what he passively received he is now making a free and intense activity of his own. This results in the creation of a symbol—namely, that freedom can only consist in that we not only suffer what is necessary but also do what is necessary; that we let the will of God not only act *upon* us but also *through* us. "Make use of whatever experience comes to you!" said Goethe; and always this has been the ultimate secret of all wisdom. It lies within ourselves alone to learn to master our destiny, in that we obey it. Suffering, no matter how great, will burst forth in a cry of rejoicing as soon as we courageously say "Yea" to it. Only he who resists the gods eternally remains bound. Sitte's work is the result of profound experience. It leads us to the ultimate problems where the highest art always intermingles with ethics, but it also is rich in technical knowledge. He shows us that Bach to-day is almost universally misunderstood by pianists. They romanticise him, and have grown accustomed to treating the piano like an organ. Bach must be cleansed of the romantic accretions: he must not be played like an organ; he must be "fingered," that is to say, played "with the weight and force of the fingers alone, without any special co-operation of the arm-muscles." During recent years it seems as if the spirit of imperialism had likewise passed into the piano. Among pianists, too, pride of muscle was everywhere in the ascendancy. The book should be welcomed as a sign that the good old German tradition is not forgotten, for through it alone can we regain our health. The real success of the book bears testimony to the vitality of the German spirit.

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