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"Beware of Pity!"

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"BEWARE OF PITY!"

With Stefan Zweig not only one of the representative figures of modern letters has passed away, but also an ~~and~~ eminent connoisseur and promoter, indeed, a great lover of literature.

This fine word, lover, seems particularly apt to describe his attitude towards life and letters. He was ~~neither sacerdotal nor militant, but receptive, enthusiastic~~, infinitely curious, always eager and prepared for new intellectual adventures. With fervor and diligence he kept exploring and extolling ever new aspects and domains of the literary cosmos. He rediscovered the classics and discovered the young. He translated foreign poetry into German and transmitted German values to five continents. He wrote prefaces, book reviews, extensive essays and innumerable letters. His literary contacts reached from Paris to Rio de Janeiro, from San Francisco to Helsingfors. He travelled, lectured, adapted old comedies for the modern stage. His collection of manuscripts was ~~absolutely~~ unique: I was awe-struck when he showed me the original ~~draft~~ of ~~important~~ works by Goethe, Balzac, Stendhal, Hölderlin, Johann Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, ~~what not~~. His own autographth went, by request, to his admirers in Leningrad or Leipzig, Milwaukee or Madrid. It also appeared ~~separately~~ on the checks with which he presented many a striving colleague. Who ever was hard off, and happened to be a writer, could depend on his helpfulness. His beautiful house in Salzburg, indeed, every hotel room where he settled ~~down~~ for a few days or weeks, became a center of literary activities.

This ardent preoccupation with the written word was completely lacking, in the case of Zweig, the ascetic pathos and monkish gravity

it possessed, for instance, in the greater case of Flaubert. The French master despised and virtually renounced life, for the sake of a vampirish abstraction, Art. His idolatry of l'art pour l'art was heroic and sacerdotal. As for Stefan Zweig, he was by no means inclined to sacrifice Life at the altar of absolute Art: on the contrary, he worshiped literature as the ~~detached~~ and comprehensive expression of man's experiences and endeavours. There was nothing rigid and exclusive in ^{his} ~~his~~ nature and attitude. In fact, he was as remote from the "Ivory Tower" - the cult of the perfect Style - as he was from the didactic brutality à la Emile Zola. The classic type in which he recognized and mirrored himself, was neither the ill-tempered high-priest of Beauty, nor the boisterous herald of Progress: it was the scholarly humanist of the Renaissance epoch - aloof but sympathetic; tolerant but incorruptible.

In his treatise on ~~Erasmus~~ Erasmus of Rotterdam, Zweig attempted to explain and defend certain features inherent in his own character. The solemn masquerade was evidently supposed to increase his authority and elucidate his objectives. Zweig asked his readers, almost openly: 'You blame me on account of my elusiveness? Maybe you think me unduly soft or craven because I choose not to side with either party in the struggle of our time? But that is the way we are - we intellectuals, we humanists, we unselfish servants of the Spirit. Hesitant, out of conscientiousness; seemingly aloof, but actually partaking in every human effort; ~~cool, understanding, just,~~ profoundly versed in all abysmal secrets of the human soul and, therefore, au dessus de la mêlée - thus we have always been, since the days of yore. Look at Erasmus, my illustrious brother!'

But the hazardous parallel is only partly correct. There is something missing in this indirect self-portrait. It stresses and reveals but one aspect of a more complex and colourful reality. Zweig at once simplified and exaggerated his ~~own character~~ ^{stature} when identifying ~~it~~ with

himself

the Sixteenth Century-scholar. ~~He was not Erasmus - not so pure, not so dry, not so great. Zweig's pacifism, his reluctance to take sides, his indulgence and flexibility - this whole noncommittal urbanity scarcely resembled the pensive detachment of the Erasmic pattern.~~

The hesitance and indecision, in ~~Erasmian~~ Erasmi case, sprang from meticulous probity. Zweig, too, was loyal and high-minded. But, at the same time, there were other ingredients fused in the compound of his character: something ^{Bland} ~~simple~~ and iridescent, seducible and seductive, a ~~bland and~~ ^{Casanova-like} ~~reluctant~~ charm. ~~He was a brisk and ingenious lover - not solely of literature. / Indeed, the great scholar and humanist was not devoid of Casanova-like features.~~

Stefan Zweig came from Vienna - not from Rotterdam.

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How typically Austrian he was! All his penchants and animosities, his smiles and motions, the cadence of his voice were unmistakably Viennese. Only Vienna produced that peculiar style of behaviour - French suavity with a touch of German pensiveness and a faint tinge of ^{oriental} ~~Germanian~~ eccentricity.

~~The cultural climate of the Reich seems rough and sterile, compared with the mellow civilization of the Austrian metropolis. Among Germans, the cosmopolitan broadmindedness occurs but exceptionally, as the result of unusual moral and mental efforts. Consequently, the international credo assumes, in the German sphere, a polemic or pedagogical pathos: it is a program ^{and} ~~postulate~~, rather than a natural way of life. But Vienna is cosmopolitan by virtue of her history and organic structure. The city on the Danube is connected, by a network of traditional affinities, with all cultural centers of Europe.~~

A mood of laissez faire and serene scepticism prevails in the Baroque palaces and patrician mansions, the literary cafés and cheap tenements of Vienna. Racial ~~or~~ national intolerance seem utterly out

of keeping with the general spirit of civilized nonchalance. Barbaric aberrations, like anti-Semitism, appear incompatible with the innermost being of Vienna. They exist; but one would like to believe that they have been imported from provincial or foreign places.

Not that Vienna is the ideal of a democratic community. The prejudices and limitations of the ancien régime have never been ^{completely} overcome.

~~completely.~~ However, the various sectors of society are interrelated in a much more cordial and ^{organic} ~~spontaneous~~ way than it is the case ⁱⁿ ~~any part of the Reich.~~ ~~in Berlin or Budapest.~~

The Baron and the Flaker driver understand each other: they have the same vocabulary and mostly the same ideas. ~~Moreover, both the nobleman and the man in the street are able and disposed to understand those highbrows, who spend their days in café-houses - making up stories for the Neue Freie Presse or comedies for the Theater-an-der-Wien.~~

The idiom of the great Viennese writers has a strong popular savour, for all its ~~cosmopolitan~~ sophistication. The enthralling verse of Hugo von Hofmannsthal emanate the ~~serenine~~ sweetness and ~~suggestive~~ simplicity of ~~authentic~~ folk-songs. And as for Arthur Schnitzler, he is not only one of the outstanding psychologists of modern literature, but also the authentic voice of his city - communicating its sadness and merriment, its desires, problems and joys.

It is in this context and against this particular background that we should try to conceive the character and oeuvre of Stefan Zweig. The Austrian element was, of course, much more essential in the texture of his personality than was the Jewish component. That is to say, not only that the cultured Jewry of Vienna had completely assimilated their way of life to the Austrian pattern, but also that the Austrian style itself - or rather, the style of Vienna - had integrated certain Jewish traditions. No German-Jewish writer could ever have attained so representative a position as Arthur Schnitzler, the Jew,

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occupied in Austrian ~~letters~~. ^{even} It may be allowed to say that the ~~Austrian~~ Jews of Vienna were ~~more~~ Viennese than ~~even~~ their non-Jewish compatriots; for they possessed, in a still higher degree, those qualities we consider specifically Austrian: the keen wit, the civilized courtesy, ~~tact and tolerance and the love of music.~~

The greatest explorer ~~and healer~~ of the human psyche in this century, Sigmund Freud, was a Viennese Jew. Stefan Zweig, who analysed and praised the inventor of psychoanalysis in an acute treatise, was in many respects ^{his} pupil, ~~indeed, the spiritual brother of the eminent "mental healer."~~ It is to him, to the bold discoverer of the unconscious, that Zweig owes most of his insights and intuitions. It was Freud's authoritative example which taught and encouraged him to untangle the confusions of the heart, to scrutinize the inspiration of masterbuilders and demons, to delve into the subterranean sphere of repressed desires and forgotten fears.

Indeed, Zweig's approach to the human drama ^{is akin to} ~~is akin to~~ ^{"mental healer"} ~~the attitude and tactic of the psychiatrist.~~ It may be that this comparison will prove more helpful than any other to elucidate ~~the complexity of a being,~~ ^{a character} whose potentialities range from Erasmus to Fouché, from Don Juan to Jesaiah. What his methods and aspirations have in common with those of the psychiatrist, is the odd blend of detachment and sympathy. ^{Zweig} ~~He~~ does not hope nor pretend to change the world by his writing; his sole ambition is to mitigate the bitterness of human suffering by amplifying our awareness of its roots and causes. The angle from which ~~he~~ ^{he} tackles reality is neither idealistic nor materialistic, in the Marxian sense. ~~He is purely human.~~ In fact, there is no "angle" at all - no principle according to which human beings could be labeled and evaluated. The only principle Zweig accepts, is that of Civilization, which exists for the sake of man.

But if man, in devastating frenzy, turns against the very civilization which was conceived and built to protect and improve his life? What will be the reaction of the lover and analyst, in such sinister case? Will he continue to "understand"? Will he abide by his detachment and sympathy? Does he not realize that sympathy has long become dangerous, indeed, suicidal, considering the murderous impetus of the assault? How can he fail to see that ~~they~~ those ferocious hordes threaten ^{OWN} ~~his, nay, their~~ civilization? Civilization implies and guarantees Liberty, which - as Zweig has put it in his last, tragic letter - remains "the greatest wealth in the world."

Why, then, does he not lift his hand to defend what is so dear, indeed, indispensable to him? Why does he not ^{protest} ~~oppose~~? Why ~~does he not resist?~~ He used to be so glib and agile, jaunty and alert. What is it that ^{has} paralyzed him now?

Beware of Pity! The title of the only novel he wrote, indicates that he knew his danger. Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner... But how could you understand and how forgive the crime, ^{and not} ~~unless you~~ feel sorry for the criminal? He is your enemy, he will kill you - and yet you understand, forgive and pity him.

How can you fight, paralyzed by knowledge and sympathy?

'I don't want to fight,' says the humanist. 'All I want is to understand.'

'But how can you strive for truth when the glaring lie triumphs? How can you maintain your detachment and dignity, under the heel of the tyrant?'

Says the humanist: 'No tyrant will ever touch me. I am free.'

He is free to die. Nothing ^{else} ~~remains~~ to be done when the last courteous letter is couched and everything put in order. The hour has arrived: the philosophical lover of life, letters and liberty invites his wife to join him in the last, macabre escapade.

Those who ^{stay} ~~remain behind~~ are saddened and bewildered. Some of them discreetly scold the defunct, because of his lack of ~~complete~~ courage. Some others think, on the contrary, he acted courageously: that is ~~the~~

what they admire him for.

How trite and arrogant are our judgments, considering the overpowering reality which is death - the unspeakable drama, which is suicide. Was he "right" to throw away his life? Was he a defeatist? Does his voluntary death affect the validity of his work? and if so, how?

The last one of these questions is the only one that makes sense. ~~For~~ To Stefan Zweig as a person our measures and evaluations are not applicable any more. Our moral concepts necessarily proceed from the presupposition that life as such is valuable and worth while. He who renounces life, automatically overcomes a morality that loses its relevance in the vacuum of eternity.

But the work remains here: it is ours. No doubt, the tragedy of the author is apt to influence our views as regards these brilliant biographies, masterly essays, skillful novelettes. Zweig's desperate action in Petropolis, Brazil, seems to have added a new note of gravity to the fluent elegance of his prose. The lights as well as the shadows become more distinct in the rich and colourful texture. With wistful admiration we watch the display of his craftsmanship. We relish his daintiness, but not without apprehension. His own death reminds us of the enemy, who wants to destroy all this. What can we do in order to protect such vulnerable splendor?

Only this: to accept and cherish those elements of his message that could have resisted: if only the other part - the fragile and weary one - had followed his own admonition: Beware of Pity!

KLAUS MANN.

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