

Labor at the Crossways

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tand. If others who are more materially minded had forgotten the Gallic sources of inspiration—at least, not he. So the critics realized, and so felt the French nation. The *Princesse Lointaine*—that true Princess of the Horizon—reminds her worldly lover:

“Combien dans le médiocre où vivre nous enserre,
Le sublime de cet amour m'est nécessaire.”

Rostand, as we said at the beginning, is the “poet of the horizon,” but of the eastern heavens, where the sun does not set but rises.

WILLIAM A. NITZE.

Rogue's March: To a Flemish Air

IT IS A GENEROUS publishing season that to *The Education of Henry Adams* and *The Great Hunger* adds *The Legend of the Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel* (McBride; \$2.50). Not often, one may assert, are thus coincidentally given for the first time to Americans three volumes with such a plausible air of being destined to longevity—although the cautious will affix to such assertion the “rider” that each book centers about a personality which is by way of being unfairly beguiling (in that it is a personality evocative of the reader's friendship, in the instant happy way in which people between bookcovers are privileged to establish such relations with beings less permanently bound in flesh) and so evades calm judgment. For to many of us these figure nowadays as new-found, heart-delighting, and eminently “personal” friends, this Ulenspiegel and this Peer Holm, come severally from Belgium and Norway, and this wistful Adams, lately freed from the decent reticences of living—so that we appraise them with the bias of friendship, doubtless, rather than by any code of “literary” values.

The honest can but confess as much, and must then pass on to further confession that of the intriguing trio one finds Tyl Ulenspiegel the most difficult to judge with any pretense of equity, because this Tyl is so frankly a rogue. It would be pleasant here to digress into speculation as to why in English literature there should be so few rogues portrayed full-length; and above all, as to why America, that in daily life derives such naive pleasure from being cheated by “fine business men” and “far-seeing statesmen,” should have produced in its writings no really memorable rogue, with the possible exception of Uncle Remus' Brer Rabbit. But, upon the whole, it appears preferable to say quite simply that Tyl Ulenspiegel has been for some five centuries famed among the people of Belgium and the Netherlands as a sort of Dutch Figaro or Scapin—as “mischief-maker, jack-of-all-trades, and by turn fool, artist, valet and physician”; that this character was appropriated and ennobled by Charles de Coster as the central figure of a heroic romance, *La Légende de Tiel Uylenspiegel*, published in 1867, and since known as “the Bible of the Flemings”;

and that this book has been recently translated into our tongue by Geoffrey Whitworth. This much it appears preferable to say as simply as possible and with frank egoism, because I am endeavoring to record my personal belief that an exceedingly splendid and great-hearted example of literary art has for the first time been rendered into delightfully adequate English; as likewise my belief that a masterpiece, such as I personally take this book to constitute, should be greeted simply, and reverently, and without vain speaking. Even to “recommend” it seems rather on a par with saying pleasant things about a sunrise.

So honest comment can but come back to this: for Tyl Ulenspiegel himself one straightway establishes a sort of peculiarly personal liking, a liking quite unbased on “literary” values, and an unmoralizing liking such as entraps you into indignation when the reforming Henry the Fifth repudiates that other not-unlovable rogue, Sir John Falstaff. “A Fleming I am,” says Tyl, “from the lovely land of Flanders, workingman, nobleman, all in one—and I go wandering through the world, praising things beautiful and good, but boldly making fun of foolishness.” So does Tyl describe himself, and the description is apt, as far as it reaches, but is overmodestly incommensurate to the speaker's variousness.

Thus Tyl can be upon occasion a very pretty fightingman indeed, performing salutary homicides with heroic thoroughness.* Here is a random taste of his quality:

Ulenspiegel took careful aim, and with his bullet shattered the tongue and the entire jawbone of Don Ruffele Henricis, son of the Duke. At the same time Ulenspiegel brought down the son of the Marquess Delmares, and in a little while more the eight ensigns and the three cohorts of cavalry were thoroughly worsted. The prisoners imagined that some angel from heaven, who was also a fine marksman, had descended from the sky to aid them, and they all fell upon their knees.

Such a deduction was natural enough, to illiterate prisoners; but the erudite will recognize forthwith the authentic manner of a national hero; for thus it was that Roland laid about him at Roncesvaux, and in very much this fashion did Achilles choke Scamander with slain Trojans.

So much of physical prowess one has the fair and

ancient right to expect of a national hero. But quite another facet of the jewel is the roguish, not at all "heroic" Tyl who delights in jokes that are not always pre-eminent for delicacy. Then, too, although Tyl is—of course—devotedly attached to the fair Nele, and their marriage at the end of his wanderings is a foregone conclusion, nobody can expect a rogue meticulously to emulate Joseph. And Tyl, be it repeated, is frankly a rogue. One therefore must regard with equanimity the Walloon maiden to whose house Tyl went to sing some Flemish love-songs which, what with one thing and another, were not ended until midnight. Then there was the beautiful, gay-hearted dame whom Tyl guided to Dudzeel; in all dealings with young men she abhorred in particular the sin of cruelty, and so Tyl left her with flushed cheeks but not displeased. Moreover, there was the Comtesse de Meghen, another benevolent lady, who offered Ulenspiegel hospitality, in the to him inadequate form of ham and *bruinbier*. "Ham!" he cried, "that is good to eat, and *bruinbier* is a drink divine. But blessed above all men shall that man be to whom it is given to dine off thy loveliness." "How the fellow does run on!" she exclaimed; and then: "Eat first, you rogue!" "Shall we not say grace 'ere we consume all these dainties?" said Ulenspiegel. "Nay," answered the lady; and presently congratulated Tyl, as in nothing resembling her husband. In fine, Tyl marches, in the pride of youth, about a world of brightly colored and generous women, and graces a world wherein he displays as much continence as appears consistent with politeness, and wherein Joseph, in the final outcome, could not manage to combine these virtues.

So likewise this rogue marches, with chance for guide, about a world that even then was ruled by folly and bigotry; and he treads blithely, as befits "a master of the merry words and frolics of youth," in shadowed places where his gibbeted kindred swing between him and the sun. For the ashes of a martyred father lie upon Tyl's breast without at all oppressing a heart whose core is roguishness. Therefore in the presence of injustice

Tyl Ulenspiegel does not slink, not even into drawing morals; instead, with chance for guide, he marches. For those who would wrong him his eye and tongue and sword stay equally keen, and the rogue knows these weapons to be in the long run sufficient; meanwhile, that there should be overtroublesome fellows to be killed now and then is as naturally a part of wandering as that there should everywhere be girls to be kissed and flagons to be emptied, and songs to be made beyond any numbering, but never the last song. So the rogue marches and puts all things to their proper uses. And the heart of the reader, given something better than the heart of a flea, goes out to this resistless rogue.

It is around this sprightly figure that De Coster has woven (coterminously, it is bewildering to reflect, with the weaving of a dreary mystery about one Edwin Drood) a romance as cruel as life and considerably gayer. Somewhat to deviate metaphorically, in this tale of fifteenth century Flanders under the yoke of Spain and the Holy Inquisition, De Coster has builded a story that is not unlike a time-mellowed cathedral, with the gentry about their devotions, and with peasants joking on the porches, and with a stately organ music accompanying both aspiration and laughter; a cathedral, too, that is no less opulent in glowing paintings than in captivatingly hideous gargoyles. And here again one is tempted to expatiate concerning these gargoyles as, say, upon the chapter that depicts the death of Charles the Fifth and his trial in heaven; or perhaps upon Tyl's hunting of the werwolf; or else to dwell upon that really intolerable "catharsis by pity and terror," when Katheline the good witch attempts to share her cup of cold water with Joos Damman in the torture chamber—although this last is a stroke of genius with which perhaps no author has the right to unsettle his reader.

Yes, one is tempted to expatiate. But once more it appears preferable to remember that a masterwork should be greeted simply, and reverently, and without vain speaking.

JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

Bridges

A hundred bridges over the river—
 And never a bridge to you,
 Not one.
 Ah, but was it a river—
 The deep, dark hole where they took you,
 Too deep, too far, too dark
 For a bridge!
 A hundred bridges over the river,
 And not one bridge to you!

ANNETTE WYNNE.