

MONTREAL LETTER.

At this date among Torontonians, *Dorothy* is in all probability evoking the same stentorian *bravissimas*, the same kindly smiles of matronly approbation that have been her guerdon here for the past week. Though perhaps old-world citizens would find much suggestive of speedy decline were an operabouffe to take precedence of the aldermanic elections, still I cannot help thinking such a situation augurs well for us. When one-half of the space devoted at present by our press to "bucket shops" and "boodlers" is given to music and the drama, so far has civilization risen from the condition in which it must find itself in every mushroom town.

Speaking of *Dorothy*, strange to say, one is by no means led to notice Miss Lillian Russell first, for despite her pert beauty and ostentatious manner, as an artiste she is quite insignificant beside Mr. Harry Paulton, the delightful Lurcher. Mr. Paulton, I believe, has given the theatre several very successful plays. His keen intelligence and fine artistic perception raise him far above the ordinary low comedian, whose exaggerated gestures and diction are more calculated to charm a matinee audience than theatre-goers of any taste. Paulton's art is good because it is simple, and he produces the more effect because he strives not after it. That ever-recurring "I beg your pardon!" of his, and the refrain of "few and far between," with its inimitable suggestion of revivalism, are quite perfect in their way.

Miss Russell's face is certainly very pretty, and she possesses a pleasing voice, but she also possesses an amount of assurance—not to call it by any other name—which seems utterly incompatible with any rôle she might ever be capable of playing. The only wonder is how our good neighbours have stood her eminently impertinent stage manner so long. She threw us a song as one would a bone to some limp-tailed mongrel, and we accepted it in that gracious, humble way peculiar to us.

We find *Dorothy* a younger sister of *Erminie*, and both are lineal descendants of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*.

Alderman Archibald, in a lecture on "The Two Races," recently gave us some just ideas respecting the relationship of French and English Canadians. Very little towards the unifying of the population has been done since the British Conquest, and this the lecturer considered was mainly due to the fact that the two constituent parts of it speak different languages; the superficial manner in which French is studied in our schools he considered a disgrace. Doubtful as it may appear at first, I am sure the deep-rooted antipathy that exists between the two races would sensibly diminish upon further acquaintance. That further acquaintance, as the lecturer truly remarked, is only to be gained from a thorough knowledge of French among the English, and *vice versa*. At present an English-Canadian here who can employ other forms of expression when speaking French than the rather irrelevant phrases of the grammar excites our undisguised admiration. To Montrealers of the West End, Rue St. Denis and Rue St. Laurent are far less familiar names than Regent Street or Piccadilly. We hardly ever read a French-Canadian paper; we know next to nothing of what our neighbours think, and perhaps care still less. I don't know whether this is a very intelligent way of living. It seems strange that with so happy an opportunity of asserting our individuality, of showing our opinion to be something better than an echo of old world prejudice, we let the subtle feeling grow apace. Of course there has existed and must always exist a radical difference between Saxon and Gaul, but is it not rather a difference that should excite mutual interest and study, than the somewhat irrational antagonism akin to the sentiment our favourite pug entertains for the feline community?

After a good deal of parleying, the M.A.A.A. affair has come to a most satisfactory conclusion. Mr. Brady has resigned. At the meeting of the Association on Friday evening Mr. Patterson promised to send in his resignation provided the motion of expulsion was withdrawn. The directors, who have throughout acted in a most manly way, saw the snare, and felt by no means inclined thus tacitly to acknowledge their former decisions had been anything but just. The amendment was lost, and Mr. Patterson resigned unconditionally.

Hustled together in rather a motley array, I found the other day in Mr. Scott's artistic emporium a most interesting collection of pictures. But more especially was my attention attracted to two canvasses of quite original merit. The one showed us an old workman, of very rubicund countenance, sitting in a wine shop, and complacently contemplating the contents of a snuff-box. The face was ugly—almost repugnant—yet the work evinced so delightfully bold and unconventional a spirit one could not help appreciating it. Then the old fellow's roughly patched breeches, of which the dark and the light-blue cotton made such honest, lovely bits of colour, were worth a picture in themselves. The second work was smaller and more attractive. Down a rough street comes a labourer with his great, strong horse beside him. Here again is the same absence of pose, the same truth, the same breath of the new-born modern art. Mr. J. Kerr Lawson is an artist whom we must admire. In this age of concession and contrivance, it revives one's faith in truth to come across one who will think his own thoughts, and speak what he thinks, quite irrespective of the world's fads and preferences. I hear from private sources that Mr. Lawson is likely to write an account from time to time, for this paper, of Canadian artists' life in Paris. It is an idea which is often carried out with marked success in the States, and from such a pen as our artist's, such a letter must prove extremely welcome to us.

LOUIS LLOYD.

A NOTE ON RUSSIAN REALISM.

A TIMELY work issued by Messrs. Crowell, *Great Masters of Russian Literature*, from the French of Dupuy, suggests a few thoughts on the distinguishing characteristics of that literature, which has of late come to fill so large a part of our intellectual horizon. There have been many words spent in the effort to discover the secret of the spell exerted by Gogol, Turgénief and Tolstoi. Much of the charm of this literature is doubtless due to its freshness. With the power and assured touch of older literatures, it sets us in a new atmosphere, it unveils to us a new domain of motives, aspirations, and influences. The method is fearlessly original, the treatment so direct and vivid that the inevitable sense of strangeness in the effects is no hindrance to a perception of their absolute fidelity. At the bottom of these qualities lies a realism, which is, it seems to me, sound and fruitful because it has its origin, not in a fickle thirst for novelty, and not in a headlong application of logical principles carried to the illogical extremes but rather in a profound sincerity and an overwhelming realization of a few of the burning facts of life.

If we had never been forced to make acquaintance with any other realism than this of the Russian Masters, there would have been no question at issue between realism and idealism. It would have been a patent truth that the two are inseparable in all work of the highest, and that the sanity, the symmetry, the applicability, of ideal creations are secured by dependence upon a selective realism. Now the rock on which, in the opinion of a large section of the best minds of the day, our Western so-called realists go to pieces, is the rock of indiscriminacy. It is because the principle of selection is ignored that scarce any of the works of those undoubtedly powerful intellects, who among us had the forces of realism, succeed in winning any universal sanction more authoritative than that of quick sales. With the Russian Masters consistency goes ever hand-in-hand with reality, and impertinent details are abhorred. When Gogol paints a scene, sketches a character, or reports a conversation, we are struck by the abundance of detail; but it is such detail only as tells appreciably toward the desired effect. Instance the following passage, quoted by Dupuy:—

"I see from here the little house, surrounded by a gallery, supported by delicate slender columns of darkened wood, and going entirely around the building, so that during thunder-showers or hail-storms the window shutters can be closed without exposure to the rain; behind the house, mulberry-trees in bloom, then long rows of dwarf fruit trees drowned in the bright scarlet of the cherries, and in an amethystine sea of plums with leaden down; then an old birch-tree, under the shade of which is spread a carpet for repose; before the house, a spacious court with short and verdant grass, with two little foot-paths trodden down by the steps of those who went from the barn to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the proprietor's house. A long-necked goose drinking from a puddle, surrounded by her soft and silky yellow goslings; a long hedge hung with strings of dried pears and apples, and rugs hung out to air; a waggon loaded with melons near the barn; on one side an ox unyoked and chewing his cud, lazily lying down. All this has for me an inexpressible charm."

French realism and American realism, in the received acceptation of the terms, are allied but not identical, and both differ from that of the Russians in that they are a theoretical deduction, rather than an organic growth. That of the French is the realism of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, to borrow a well-used phrase; it grants full credence to no physical facts save those which have their origin in man's physical nature. To it whatever is exceptional is unreal, or rather, I should say, whatever is exceptionally high; for much that falls almost infinitely below the human average, in conduct, in motive, in external and internal grace, comes within the range of its clearest vision and receives its all too frank acknowledgment. Selection, if not despised, is applied only to eliminate whatever might serve as an æsthetic or moral pattern. It is a realism which, while arrogating to itself a rigidly scientific method, is so unscientific as to make its deductions from imperfect specimens and to ignore the highest developments of the type.

Something much more decorous and urbane we have in American realism, which is that of the deliberately curious and conscientiously unheroic observer. Even though it be not very inspiring, even though some of the characters with which it makes us so intimately acquainted are bores, there is yet no great sin to urge against it save that most respectable sin of dulness. It partakes more of the nature of a catalogue or a commonplace book than of a work of creative art. In a word, it fails to impress one with a sense of vitality, being the result not so much of fervent conviction as of a desire to win vogue and to furnish entertainment in a marketable form. But the realism which we find in Russian literature is something widely different from this in origin, aim, and quality. It is the realism of passionate purpose, and of knowledge that has undergone the fusing of concentrated emotion. It springs from a national impulse, a restlessness under burdens long endured, a yearning love of country. It seeks to free the voice of a people long dumb, and to give expression to that which it knows for absolute truth. Too sincere not to be faithful in details, it is yet too much in earnest for details that are irrelevant; and as a result of all this it has something of the sanction of universality. It is not content to simply entertain; it inspires and impregnates. It is no mere cunning ordering of observations, it is life revealed in a white light. Vast interests are at stake, and what is without significance is forgotten.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

King's College, Windsor, N.S.