Review

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Hamann und die Aufklärung. Studien zur Vorgeschichte des romantischen Geistes im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Von RUDOLF UNGER. 2 Vols. Jena: E. Diederichs. 1911. 8vo. 989 pp.

La Vie et l'Oeuvre de J. G. Hamann, le 'Mage du Nord.' Par JEAN BLUM. Paris: F. Alcan. 1912. 8vo. xxii + 704 pp.

The last few years have brought us a long way forward in our knowledge of one of the most fascinating figures of the mid-eighteenth century in Germany, Johann Georg Hamann, 'der Magus im Norden.' There is something peculiarly elusive about Hamann; his earlier biographers and critics proved themselves totally unable to cope with him; they applied to him the criteria which had done excellent service in estimating the other thinkers and men of letters of his time; but these failed entirely when applied to Hamann. The result was merely flat and insipid, something that did not in the least correspond to the enormous power which Hamann wielded over German intellectual life. But although such attempts to sound Hamann's personality had signally failed, Jakob Minor in his little book on *Hamann in seiner Bedeutung für die Sturm- und Drangperiode*, did succeed in defining and formulating the influence which Hamann exerted on that movement and caused him to be greeted with such unmeasured acclamation as its prophet. This was the first step in the right direction.

Dr R. Unger of Munich has now put the study of Hamann on a solid basis; some seven or eight years ago he published a highly suggestive and promising study of Hamann's 'Sprachtheorie'; and this was followed in 1911 by the present two large volumes. These form a monumental example of German intellectual energy. Unger has devoted unwearied industry to the elucidation of Hamann's cryptic writings; and he has faced, as no one before him, the question: how is Hamann's significance for his time to be explained? How could this poor, middle-class youth, born in a remote corner of Europe, educated in a most perfunctory fashion, sent raw or, at best, half-baked to the university of Königsberg, become an intellectual pioneer of the first rank? How came it that, amidst a wearing life of economic struggle and irritating friction, as tutor in noblemen's houses, this man was able to understand with such surprising sureness of intuition, the new ideas which were in the air in France and England, and even to anticipate the individualistic revolt against rationalism of Rousseau and Diderot? Seen aright, there is no more momentous event in the intellectual history of the eighteenth century than Hamann's journey to London and that spiritual crisis in a London garret, when he turned to his Bible, sought refuge from the prison bars of the 'Aufklärung' in the religion of his fathers, and built up his life anew on faith and the miracle.

It is difficult to attempt to do justice here to Professor Unger's work, the range of which extends far beyond the province of mere literary history or criticism. Everywhere this book opens up new

vistas, not merely with regard to Hamann's relations to the past, but in a still higher degree with regard to his relations to the future; in fact, it is in this latter respect that I am inclined to see the most significant side of Unger's criticism. He has presented Hamann's thought—and presented it with an overwhelming array of evidence—as the common ground, the connecting matrix, of the two great phases of German individualism: 'Sturm und Drang' and Romanticism. On the other hand, there is room for a certain disappointment with the general introductory chapters of the book. Professor Unger's excessive thoroughness has perhaps taken him further back into the past than was necessary; or, at least, one might question the necessity of so exhaustive a review of the intellectual evolution before Hamann, when the critic has little new light to throw on it. But Professor Unger's burden of learning is so large that it is perhaps hardly reasonable for us to expect him, here, at least, to offer us in addition a reconstruction of Germany's spiritual history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or to complain because he has accepted, on the whole, the interpretation of that history which has done service hitherto. The fact remains that what he has achieved for Hamann will for long be regarded as final. He has approached him in the right way; recognised in him the mysterious, elusive being he is; has wrestled with him and conquered, not by the rules of logic and reasoning, but by recognising the divine unreason that inspired him, and by thus getting behind the sphinx-riddles with which his writings bristle.

The French book on Hamann is much lighter in calibre, which is not, however, to say that it is light reading. Perhaps M. Blum has fallen just a little into that fault of the Gildemeisters and others who dealt with Hamann a generation ago, of treating him too much from the common-sense point of view. There is little of the magic and mystery of Hamann left in this plain, matter-of-fact, albeit scholarly piece of work. It bears from first page to last the stamp of the good French degree thesis: that is to say, is written strictly according to the rules, and carries the clear, logical methods of reasoning, of which such exercises are so admirable a test, to a triumphant conclusion. But in the end the real spirit of the 'Magus' has escaped M. Blum; and when in his summing up of Hamann's faith, he tells us that it was built up round the two concepts of Creation and Revelation, I am doubtful if such a reduction of Hamann's doctrine to a mere phrase is not rather the reverse of helpful to the student who is trying to understand him. But M. Blum's good points, his lucid presentment of Hamann's life and work, ought not to be overlooked. The English reader who seeks an introduction to Hamann will possibly learn more from M. Blum than from Professor Unger; for a critic who divests a mystic writer of his obscurity is always a more helpful one than one who tries to grapple with such things, to meet them, as it were, on their own ground. And M. Blum's book is also in its way—and in a different way from Professor Unger's—a contribution to the study of Hamann's significance for the future; he looks at Hamann more exclusively from the standpoint of

philosophy and religion, and pleads for him being regarded as a direct forerunner of the first champion of nineteenth-century individualism, Sören Kierkegaard.

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LONDON.

Schriften des literarischen Vereins in Wien. Vols. I–XVII. Vienna: Verlag des literarischen Vereins, 1904–1912. 8vo.

The stately series of well-printed and tastefully bound green volumes which I have before me represent the activity of the Vienna 'literarische Verein' during the first nine years of its existence. These may be regarded as alike a symptom and an illustration of that closer study of literature from the standpoint of nationality and race, which is characteristic of the best German critical work of our time. The age of Goethe knew only one German literature; to-day the tendency is to distinguish carefully a multitude of different literatures written in the German tongue; to lay weight on the reflexion of tribal peculiarities in the poetry of Switzerland, Swabia, Westphalia, etc. and to discriminate these literatures within a literature accordingly. It is obvious that no 'province' cries out more vehemently for such 'separist' treatment than German-speaking Austria. And there has been, during the last twenty or thirty years, no doubt, a great intensification of the study of Austrian literature as such; these years have seen a revival of interest in Austria's great national poet, Grillparzer; the publication of an elaborate and admirable History of Austrian Literature¹; and with an increasingly active interchange of spiritual products between Berlin and Vienna there has come a desire not to lose sight of the distinction between north and south, and, at the same time, to define the specifically Austrian element in the poetic work of our time. To this general tendency belongs the establishment of the Literary Society of Vienna, the object of which is the publication and elucidation of Austria's national literature.

Of these volumes the five—a sixth is promised—containing *Grillparzers Gespräche und Charakteristiken seiner Persönlichkeit durch die Zeitgenossen* (Vols. I, III, VI, XII, XV), collected and edited by Professor August Sauer, obviously claim first attention. That in spite of his labours as editor of the Grillparzer edition at present being published under the auspices of the City of Vienna, Professor Sauer should have found time to compile this indispensable basis for an understanding of the poet, is a tribute to his inexhaustible energy. He has done here for Grillparzer what Biedermann did for Goethe; only he has cast his net wider, not restricting himself merely to recorded conversations. The result is a complete picture of the poet as he was reflected in the

¹ *Deutsch-Österreichische Literaturgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung in Österreich-Ungarn.* Unter Mitwirkung hervorragender Fachgenossen herausgegeben von J. W. Nagl und Jakob Zeidler. Vienna, C. Fromme, 1899 ff.