

NOTE

Charles Van Lerberghe holds a peculiar place in the contemporary Belgian Renaissance. His actual literary achievement has, in bulk, been singularly meagre. A few poems, one or two compositions in prose: and here, for the present, the chronicle ends. On the other hand, there is probably no member of 'Young Belgium,' whether under the familiar flag of 'La Jeune Belgique,' or beneath that of the new protestant standard, 'Le Coq Rouge,' who would not at once name, or at least acknowledge, the author of 'Les Fleureurs' as one of the two or three most distinctive leaders of the 'movement.' The three foremost living writers in Belgium are, indubitably: in Poetry, Emile Verhaeren; in Fiction, Georges Eekhoud; and, in the 'Drame Intime,' Maurice Maeterlinck. Verhaeren may be approached as one of the most noteworthy among all living poets who use the French tongue. Eekhoud is, probably, the most consistent and 'natural' realist in Europe. Strangely enough, his only near rival in France is a Belgian also, Camille Lemonnier: but that powerful and sombre writer is overshadowed by Zola, to whose school, save in the admirable Flemish work of his earlier years, he belongs. Eekhoud has more in common with Guy de Maupassant than with any other French novelist; but he has a style so distinctive, a Flemish sentiment so continually domineering, and an individuality so unique, that he cannot be called the Belgic Guy de Maupassant any more aptly than (as some have loosely called him) the Flemish Zola. He is, in fact, more akin to the foremost Italian realist, Giovanni Verga. 'I Malivoglia' is the Calabrian equivalent of 'Kees Doorik' or 'Kermesses.' Maurice Maeterlinck is so well known now, that it is needless to say anything here concerning his achievement in imaginative psychological drama, and in other prose and verse. What is of interest is, that his herald—and a pioneer whose influence has been one strongly marked and widespread—was Charles Van Lerberghe. In 'The Nineteenth Century' (Sept. 1893), and elsewhere, I have indicated more fully the place and influence of M. Van Lerberghe, to whom, indeed, I was the first in this country to draw attention, both before and at the time of Maurice Maeterlinck's advent as 'the new man.' Here it must suffice to point out, that to Charles Van Lerberghe is due the credit of having inaugurated what is, too loosely it may be added, called the Maeterlinckian Drama. M. Maeterlinck himself admits the author of 'Les Fleureurs' as his predecessor, and it was to him, and in recognition of 'this new and strange, this apparently crude but artistically wrought presentment of the brutality of the commonplace of death,' that his first book was dedicated.

W. S.