

THE AMAZON

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The Amazon by Carl Vosmaer

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CARL VOSMAER

THE AMAZON



Arms to Arms me



Sari D. Baras
Detroit

THE AMAZON

BY

CARL VOSMAER

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GEORG EBERS

TRANSLATED BY

E. J. IRVING

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TO
MARTINUS NYHOFF,

MY FELLOW TRAVELLER,
PARTICIPATOR OF MANY OF THOSE IMPRESSIONS

WHICH HAVE TAKEN FORM IN

THESE PAGES;

MY KIND ADVISER, ENCOURAGER, AND

SUPPORTER, THIS EDITION IS

Dedicated,

AS A TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP,

BY

THE AUTHOR.



*Request of
L. L. Barbour
4-17-26*

P R E F A C E .

FROM France there has passed into our country a literary current which calls itself Realistic. It prides itself on a close reproduction of reality, because it regards the actually existing—and that only—as real. In the eyes of the Realist the actual is everything, and he will not hear of its being ennobled and elevated into a higher phase of existence by means of the mysterious process which goes on in the soul of that creator whom we call an artist. The individual fact reigns supreme; the so-called actual is regarded as the only true thing; the word idea, as defined by Plato, is only known to the representatives of this school in philosophical terminology. They turn the mirror of the artist's soul, wherein the world of phenomena ought to be reflected more distinctly, more brightly and purely than in the souls of other men, into a photographer's plate; and, when this plate reproduces every spot on the surface of the object, they have attained the aim of their endeavors. Nay, the spot, the excrescence, is in their eyes the most important consideration; and—seeing that what is natural,

while so frequently at one with what is beautiful, can now and then be mean and deformed — they regard the coarse and abnormal as the natural, and choose it for the subject-matter of their works.

Ancient art likewise drew its materials from nature and reality, but not from the accidental reality of our modern Realists. That which the ancients presented to us as real, is absolute ; for it is the idea, the prototype of its order, which unites in itself everything that that order includes. "The light that never was on land or sea" has no existence for the Realists. They confine themselves exclusively to the actual object, which is perishable and transitory. It does not occur to them that the sublime pictures of a Dante, which show what never actually existed, and was present merely to the great poet's introverted eye, are a thousand times more truthful than their figures, "copied from real life," whose physical deformities and impurities, whose morbid propensities and moral aberrations they so assiduously study and depict.

Many of them profess that they seek to amend the faults of society by holding up the mirror to nature. The remedy they employ is disgust. Not pity and terror, but simply disgust, appears to be the æsthetic means by which the tragic writers among them endeavor to exercise a salutary influence.

It is a law in physics that every wave that rises must

leave a "wave valley" behind it; and if we compare romantic unnaturalness to the wave that tosses its foaming crest in the face of heaven, the Realistic movement is the inevitable wave-valley. To change the metaphor, we might call Realism the headache which has followed the intoxication of Romanticism.

Between the two there lies an immense space. No doubt the narrator, more especially the epic poet and his half-brother the novelist, must above all things be true to nature; but he, too, like every man who aspires to a place in the temple of Art, must strive after a higher truth than the grossly sensual, and never forget that Art, if transplanted into the domain of ugliness, can no more put forth blossoms than the palm can amidst snow and ice. The Beautiful is the native soil, the vital air, the sunshine and the rain of Art. Without beauty no work of art can exist; thus, though naked Realism may produce clever art-manufactories, it can never produce a genuine work of art.

Nevertheless, Realism is a noteworthy phenomenon, springing from the peculiar character of our times, and which, though neither elevating nor constructive, teaches the poet to exercise self-restraint, while it sharpens his eye for detail—for that which is small in nature and life. Since Realism began to be a power, intrinsic probability is no longer sufficient to satisfy unless it clothe itself with the garment of extrinsic possibility. Like

many poisons, this unhealthy French Realism may be a useful medicine; but in itself it falls as far short of genuine truth to nature as waxwork falls short of sculpture.

Among the poets who never overstep the limits of probability and yet aspire to realize the ideal, in whose works we breathe a purer air, who have power to enthral and exalt the reader's soul, to stimulate and enrich his mind, we must number the Netherlander Vosmaer.

The novel "Amazon," which attracted great and just attention in the author's fatherland, has been translated into our tongue at my special request. In Vosmaer we find no appalling incident, no monstrous or morbid psychology, neither is the worst side of human nature portrayed in glaring colors. The reader is afforded ample opportunity of delighting himself with delicate pictures of the inner life and spiritual conflicts of healthy-minded men and women. In this book a profound student of ancient as well as modern art conducts us from Paestum to Naples, thence to Rome, making us participators in the highest and greatest the Eternal City can offer to the soul of man.

Vosmaer is a poet by the grace of God, as he has proved by poems both grave and gay; by his translation of the Iliad into Dutch hexameters, and by his lovely epos "Nanno." His numerous essays on aesthetics, and more especially his famous "Life of Rem-
