PORTUGUESE SHORT STORIES

In our series of short stories of the nations we present this month two examples of modern Portuguese literature. We have chosen these two in order to give our readers a glimpse of more than one aspect of Portuguese writing.

Dr. Julio Dantas, most popular of novelists and playwrights in Portugal today, comes from the French school of literature. He is an unobserved observer of human life. His style is easy and elegant, his pen light, yet vibrating with emotion.

Fialho d’Almeida, the author of the second story, on the other hand, heads the Portuguese school of realism. His passion is the merciless dissection of the soul of his people. He is the more “national” of the two authors, and this story of his is a truly Portuguese product, full of the color, humor, and movement of Portuguese life.

The translations were made by Miss Maria da Costa Roque, the author of “Timor Mulata,” which appeared in our issue of January 1942.—K.M.

DRAMÁ

By JULIO DANTAS

YESTERDAY after dinner, my friend Dr. Torres, who has not been in practice for some fifteen years and whose solid, fair-haired good looks constitute even now the object of the love of many a beautiful woman, sank onto the cushions of my divan and said:

“I am going to tell you a subtle tale of conscience. Life is infinitely colorful, my friend, and situations of sentiment are sometimes of such unexpectedness, let me tell you . . . of such ridiculous unexpectedness.

I was visited yesterday by a man of refined appearance who has been trying for some time to approach me. I received him with the polite reserve with which one receives a stranger.

He was a tall man, elegant and rather stiff, wearing his clothes in the same dry manner with which a military man wears his civilian suit. He had a beard à la Guise, a noble profile, thick eyebrows, and a good complexion. When he talked, I noticed that he expressed himself with difficulty, that his lips trembled, and that his facial muscles moved in spasmodic contractions. A grave anxiety seemed to trouble this man, outwardly so calm and expressionless. I did my best to set him at ease and asked him whether I could be of any assistance to him.

He took hold of himself at last, removed his gloves, and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. Then, in a long half hour, he told me the object of his visit. It concerned a lady in his family whom, he said, I would perhaps not remember but who had been my constant companion in childhood and who had been educated at Aveiro in the Dominican Convent of Jesus. She was of great beauty and had married a year and a half ago. She had had a difficult childbirth and suddenly, one day at her house at Pedrogão, after a thunderstorm, she had her first attack of madness. She was taken to Lisbon, and the doctors were quick to recognize puerperal mania. The attacks, instead of improving, became worse every day, and soon it was impossible to calm her.

Much to the reluctance of her family and her husband, she had to be put into a strait-jacket. It was then, said my visitor, whose face contracted at each word he said, it was then that the sick
woman started to pronounce a name. It was the name of a well-known man. The poor woman seemed to regain lucid moments whenever she uttered that name. She smiled when people talked to her about him. In her hallucinations she thought she heard his voice.

From that moment the family and the doctors realized that the name of this person, the sight of his picture, or the promise of his visit, were the only means to pacify her. Eventually her attacks became more violent. The amorous mysticism took the form of a dominating passion. She demanded the presence of the object of her mania. The doctors arrived at the conclusion that that man alone could save her.

'That man,' said the stranger, clasping his gloves tightly in his hands, 'that man is you, Dr. Torres.'

I started as if violently struck. At that moment the light falling on his head gave him the perturbing effect of a certain portrait by Vermeer. Finally he said, cutting the silence between us, his voice sharp, expressionless, cold:

'I came here to ask you the supreme favor of going to see this lady. You are the only person who can save her, for she loves you more than anyone else in the world.' I got up, dazed, my eyes on him.

'And you?' I asked slowly, 'who are you?'

'I am her husband,' he answered.'
"If only we could keep for ourselves at least one jar of wine this year!" said Canelas to his wife Luisa. "Even if we sold it later, it would give us a profit equal to a pig of 125 pounds."

The vintage lasted four days. It was a profitable one. When it was all over, they gave a dinner to which their neighbor Monica, their son's comadre (godmother) was invited.

"When the time comes, you must taste a little glass of our wine!" said Luisa to Monica, a serene figure of a widow, with a sterile breast and a big greedy nose. Monica smiled broadly.

"Let us wait till the winter comes," she said.

After that feast, the comadre's affection towards her godchild doubled. She would come every day to inquire about her neighbor's health and about their barrel of wine.

One Sunday, as Canelas left the house for the market, Monica and Luisa tasted their first glass of the red wine. Good liquid, yes sir! It was so good that, if it ran through the stones of the street, it would crack them! Caramba! How about another glass? Canelas would not notice it...

One glass after another of the red liquid they drank, till, satisfied, their noses and cheeks red, they sat near the fire, laughing and talking loudly, rubbing their paunches and telling each other the latest scandals of the village.

"You know what? Our wine has been stolen!"

She was flabbergasted.

"Holy name of God!" she wailed. "Can you imagine such a misfortune!"

"You drank it!" Canelas accused his wife. She glared at him, and did not answer. Canelas' angry countenance changed to an infuriated one.

"You sold it!" he shouted, his voice harsh and threatening.

After a violent scene, Canelas went out. His wife went to the comadre's house and related the whole tragedy.

Monica calmly removed her spectacles and laid her knitting on the table.

"Don't worry! This very night the whole thing will be settled."

"But how? Good God, if he should find out!"

"Tonight, you will see. Tonight."

Canelas came back for supper ill-tempered and nervous. He kicked the dog Bedelho, the cat, and the basket of vegetables by the fireside. "These drunkards, santo Deus, these drunkards," and he shook an angry finger at the innocent smoked sausages hanging above the fire.

He had a sleepless night, talking about his wine and cursing the hour he had married. But he had never seen Luisa tipsy. Perhaps the vat had absorbed part of the wine... But so much!...

No, impossible! Ten, eleven, twelve o'clock, and he was still tossing in bed. Suddenly he heard the sound of pattering feet on the roof. He listened and called to his wife.

"Do you hear?"

"Yes," she answered, "witches!"

They heard voices, faint at first, then distinct and loud.

"Canelas! Canelas!" said the weird voices.

Canelas started to recite his Credo, stopped in the middle, stammering painfully. The witches went on.

When Christmas came, Canelas opened his wine vat. Que diabo! It was half gone! He called Luisa.
THE XXth CENTURY

“Shall we drink his wine? Ah! Ah! Ah! Shall we drink his wine?”

Canelas and his poor wife Luisa felt cold perspiration on their foreheads.

“Our wine! So this is how—”

Next day, as soon as he saw the faintest light on the window, Canelas got up and went to the fields. When he came back for lunch he was a changed man. He caressed Bedelho and inquired whether his son had gone to school. Luisa’s pale face touched him.

“What is the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” she answered mortified.

“Nothing.”

After a short pause he turned to her again. “Is there anything you want?” he asked tenderly. “Just tell me.”

“To tell the truth—one or two fish from the river, they would taste like heaven with a drop of olive oil.”

He did not hesitate for a second.

“I shall go right now.”

Canelas whistled as he took his fishing basket and rod from the wall.

“I shall be back in no time,” he said to Luisa cheerfully and went off.

Luisa ran at once to Monica.

“Now! Let’s go!”

“Not yet,” answered the astute comadre. “Let’s wait a few minutes more.”

Canelas, alone by the side of the river, looked around him and shivered. It was a quiet, deserted part of the village. The beech trees hid in their branches secrets that he would never solve. If the witches knew he was here! The rod shook in his hand. Suddenly he heard voices.

“Canelas!”

God! He peered into the water trying desperately to concentrate on his fishing.

“Shall we put needles in his kidneys?”

“No, his wife is praying for him!”

“Luisa is too good for him! He is Satan himself. Shall we drown him?”

“No, Luisa is praying”

“Shall we break his jar of wine?”

“Ah, ah, ah, yes!”

The wretched Canelas lifted his arms to the skies.

“What a calamity! My wonderful vinho tinto!”

Later on, Luisa, praying with her rosary by the fireside and enveloped in her mantia of wool, saw her husband come home. Like a madman he dashed toward the wine cellar, hatless, without fish, without rod, and without basket.

“Luisa, come and see! We are ruined!”

She ran to the cellar and, at the sight of the broken vat of wine, she shouted in chorus with her husband.

Comadre Monica came in, attracted by the clamor.

“What is happening in this house?”

“The witches, comadre, the witches,” cried Canelas, “they have ruined us.”

“Good God! But do not worry. I know the prayers to exorcise them. I know the secret.”

From that day on, Canelas and his wife were never again disturbed by witches, such had been the efficacy of comadre Monica’s prayers . . . .

And every winter, she and Luisa enjoyed Canelas’ best wine in peace.
BOOK REVIEW


Western science has long given up the idea that Chinese civilization was a homogeneous entity from the start, preserved through the centuries without great changes, free from outside influences. The search for its origin, therefore, promises many astonishing and unexpected answers, but only the most careful research and detailed study of Chinese ethnology and literature can hope to disentangle the underbrush that covers the soil and roots of China's growth. The trees that are above it for everyone to see give no more than hints of their origin. Dr. Eberhard has now given us a collection of all the material pertaining to this question to be found in Chinese literature, in the form of "ethnical series." He starts from the hypothesis that there was no uniform, or basic, or "Chinese" culture before the time of the Chou dynasty. What is now termed "border" or "local cultures" was originally the material out of which Chinese culture was shaped.

The book Die Lokalkulturen des Südends und Ostens (Local Cultures of the South and the East) is Part 2 of Vol. II of the author's gigantic undertaking. Unfortunately, the preceding books are not available now, and frequent references to them often make the reader feel at a loss. It might be a good idea to start with the chapter "General Summary," which clearly and concisely sums up the facts which the author proves by means of his unique method of "series." With the final goal thus already clearly in mind, it will not be quite as bewildering to delve into the rich collection of minute details grouped under "The Yao Culture," that of mountain people, "The Tai Culture" of people who cultivated rice, "The Yüeh Culture" of people who lived along the shores, and several smaller cultural units.

Copious notes taken from all kinds of Chinese literature, together with observations resulting from field work, have enabled the author to string together innumerable customs, beliefs, and superstitions. They often seem like pieces of a puzzle which do not fit at all—for example, the frog, the mortar, and the drum; human sacrifices, tree cult, and boat races—but there is always some more or less convincing link which holds them together, such as fertility magic. Often, when the connections seem less convincing, one has a feeling that a few more, explicit sentences by the author would have sufficed to dispel the reader's uncertainty. But there can be no doubt that both method and material are of far-reaching ethnological significance.

To most students of things Chinese the results of archeological research and the theories based thereon are better known than the store of ancient beliefs, which cannot be dug bodily from the soil but must be ferreted out in Chinese books. This the author has done and thus has presented us with quite a new set of ideas and facts to be worked into the existing ethnological and archeological theories. There is much food for thought and a wealth of material for further study in these 588 pages. The author himself regards this as the mission of his book.

The local cultures of prehistoric times, which were scattered all over the regions later covered by historical China, must have been fully developed at the turn of the third to the second millennium B.C. Traits found in advanced Chinese culture, where they appear singly and often without logical connection with other features making up this culture, are found to be deeply rooted in some old local culture or other. If this can be proved for one cultural trait after another, the conclusion is inevitable that these old cultures, however pushed to the borders, are really the foundation and source of what we call Chinese culture today. It grew through a series of, often complicated, processes by which local cultures influenced and joined each other; they overlapped and formed new centers of higher, secondary, and even more complex tertiary cultures. The Hsia and Lung-shan, even the Shang cultures, were only stages in this process, which nears its goal towards the end of the second millennium B.C. The Chous created the first big political realm in East Asia; but their culture, which now at last we may call "Chinese," was not something they alone had developed and spread; it was the motley heritage of all the more or less primitive cultures, which had grown together and now at last, in their final combination, could assume a national character.—Eleanor Consten

Map of the Mediterranean and Adjacent Countries. (Shanghai, 1942, Max Nössler & Co.)

In view of the fighting now going on in the Mediterranean area and the further developments to be expected there, the appearance of this clear yet detailed six-color map is both valuable and timely.

Japan in Deutschland (Japan in Germany), by A. R. Kroeger. (Shanghai, 1943, Max Nössler & Co., 46 pp.)

Frequent reports about new branches of the German-Japanese Association being established in towns throughout Germany have called attention to Japanese-German cultural relations. The booklet Japan in Deutschland, published both in Japanese and German, gives a comprehensive and complete account of Japanese cultural activities in Germany.