

as the reader or Miss Glasgow herself understand her motives, she remains the only three-dimensional figure.

M. C.

The Black Drop, by Alice Brown. New York: The Macmillan Co.

WITH all due regard for the sensibilities of those who wish to subject the arts to the test of 100 per cent Americanism, it must be admitted that the level of our war fiction is deplorably low. Except in the capacity of propagandists, most of our writers can scarcely be said to have done their bit. *The Black Drop* is free from cheap and glaring defects in plot and style. It is a good novel, as American novels go. And yet, paradoxically enough, its comparative technical excellence only emphasizes the futility of the attempt to create enduring literature out of a contrast between American righteousness and Teutonic wickedness.

Miss Brown lays the scene of her story in Boston in the few months which preceded America's entrance into the war. She sketches a typical New England family imbued with a grave and scholarly type of culture. The grandfather is a kindly, ineffectual person, who writes correct and uninteresting novels that fail to sell. His wife, helpful and devoted, remains largely in a softly shaded background. John, the younger son, a cripple, is the hero, although he takes himself and his determination to bring America into the war with somewhat sophomoric seriousness. The black sheep of the family is Charles, the older brother, an unscrupulous materialist who is deeply implicated in various German conspiracies. As the plot develops the evidence against Charles piles up; there are a few episodes of German intrigue, a trifle less absurd than such episodes usually are; and the story comes to an end as America enters the war, with a general meting out of punishments to the guilty and rewards to the virtuous.

The novel is not devoid of passages of dramatic power. The author achieves an effect that is at once pathetic and convincing when Charles's wife, who has left him in abhorrence at his treachery, declares that she will go back and stand by him if he is to be sent to prison. Miss Brown has studied puritan psychology to good effect. But all the author's skill cannot remove an impression of unreality from a novel whose fundamental appeal lies in hatred of all things German. Hatred itself is legitimate and excellent artistic stuff. But there are hates and hates. A hatred born of centuries of oppression, of wrongs suffered and inflicted can well express itself in terms of sombre and powerful art. But America's hatred for Germany, manufactured almost overnight, nursed along by movie dramas and four minute Ciceros, venting itself in such puerilities as changing *Die Meistersinger* to *The Mastersingers* on concert programs, such an artificial and spurious emotion could not conceivably generate a sense of authentic and deeprooted passion. *The Black Drop* must be considered another piece of literary propaganda, more clever than most of its kind, but scarcely less ephemeral.

W. H. C.

Contributors

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LENIN

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