

Krazy Kat

THE wisest course always for the health of art is to admit each thing for what it is and to work from that. In setting out on a piece of work an artist may wisely grant his actual objective source to be whatever it is, and from that may abstract his own essential quality. The history of painting, for example, shows that men have got their best results not by starting off to paint forms, but rather by working from the world around them and abstracting their forms from actuality. A painter, in other words, will achieve a more significant triangularity not with mere triangles out of his head but by taking his subject—people, landscape, objects—and discerning or creating triangles in them. By doing so he is abstracting idea from resistant matter; he is holding himself to substance, as his mind and soul holds to his body; and he is giving us a closer expression of life by working in terms of his struggle between matter and idea. Or, for another example, take Molière. Molière in his plays, however deeply he might or might not conceive them, kept always on them the features of that farce that was their source, did so in fact to such an extent that English readers are still misled as to the nature of his serious mind. Molière did not try to begin with some theory of social comedy taken from the air; he worked from the farce that lay ready to his hand; he never denied it but abstracted from it his high design, and forced it to yield the creation that he willed in it.

Mr. John Alden Carpenter with his Krazy Kat shows the same fine instinct. It appears, incidentally, in his courageous insistence on the right company for the piece. He does not present Krazy Kat as a part of some symphony concert program, to be heard by an audience in a traditional and biased region, and to be judged by critics who after years of infinite concerts are suffering from a kind of ear shock, and who, besides, know nothing of Krazy Kat's dialect, nothing of its world or of its meaning. He gives it to the public in the company where it belongs, in vaudeville, in the follies, in the midst of the fantastically popular and jazz. The same instinct appears, importantly, in Mr. Carpenter's handling of his material. He does not start with something to be superimposed on something half denied; he begins with the jazz and funny-paper world and forces something out of it, abstracts from it a purer pattern.

Mr. George Herriman now for seven years has been building up Krazy Kat, a tiny, diaphanous and crack-brained epic of love, of love with all its folly, blindness, optimism, obstinacy and imperviousness, and of all the elements that prey upon it. Krazy Kat loves Ignatz Mouse, who hates him, though Krazy Kat will never recognize that fact. Ignatz loves Officer Pup, who in turn loves Krazy Kat. And there is Don Kiyoti, the Andalusian slicker, a sort of wise guy who lives by his wits; and Walter Cephus Austridge, the dicky bird with the shirt front; and Joe Stork, purveyor of progeny to prince and proletariat, who lives on the enchanted mesa, and who is always looking for customers on whom he can thrust an offspring and is always fled by everyone. There is Señora Marihuanna Pelona, the Mexican widow, on whom Joe Stork, when he can break his way into no other house, puts off the infants, which she, being a widow, can never account for properly. And there is Mock Duck, the Chinese launderer de luxe; and the Duck Duke who wears a high hat and smokes a cigar; and Kolin Kelly, the brick merchant, who supplies Ignatz with bricks to throw at Krazy Kat; and the rich dog, Van Wag Taylor, president of the Moon Haters Association and of the the Bone Trust, married

to a very rich lady who refuses to have any children and into whose house Joe Stork is always trying to find a way. There are Krazy Kat's three sons, Milton, Marshall and Irving, and the diverse branches of the clan, headed by Krazier and also Kraziest, the wisest member of the family. And there are the families of Ignatz Mouse and Officer Pup. In a society of such personages as these and from such infatuations the incidents happen.

Out of all this for the seven minutes of his pantomime Mr. Carpenter has put together a story around Krazy Kat and the dance. Krazy Kat lies asleep at the foot of a tree. Bill Poster walks in and sticks up a notice of the grand ball. He is drunk on his own paste, and as he goes out he stumbles and steps on Krazy Kat's tail. Krazy Kat awakes, sees the sign, and is filled with the dancing idea. On the clothes line he sees a ballet skirt. He puts it on and begins to dance. Joe Stork comes in with his bag, looking for a customer. He leaves the bag behind him, and in it Krazy Kat finds instead of a kitten a vanity case. He makes ready for the grand ball. Ignatz Mouse enters and throws a brick at Krazy Kat. Officer Pup chases Ignatz away, and then, seeing that all is well, he goes on by. The Mysterious Stranger enters, in a great white sombrero and holding a huge bouquet which he offers Krazy Kat to smell. But the bouquet is catnip and Krazy Kat goes mad from a long draught of its perfume. He starts a wild Spanish dance. This delights Ignatz, for it is exactly what he had hoped for; he plans to exhaust Krazy Kat and then destroy him. Officer Pup comes in, but he is fooled by Ignatz' clever disguise and passes on again. Ignatz throws off his disguise and hits Krazy Kat with a brick. The officer returns, beats up Ignatz and throws him over the wall, and goes away. But Krazy Kat is very happy because Ignatz has landed the brick on him, he takes the brick always as a message of love. All is well; Ignatz appears laughing above the wall, and Krazy Kat lies down at the foot of the tree and returns to his dreams. For in this land of love and its obsessions no one is ever hurt after all. The music dies away and the curtain falls.

The acting of Krazy Kat, as it goes now at the Greenwich Village Follies, though Mr. Yakovlev's pantomime is good and Fortunello and Cirilino bring a flow of amazing rhythm to their miming, is not yet up to the level of Mr. Carpenter's music and Mr. Herriman's picture. About this picture, as you see it on the stage, there is something that seems in an odd way to let the eye through. The light is so managed that the cartoons at the back, turning on rollers and changing every two or three minutes against the action in front of them, the costumes in black and white, the walls, the grayish trees on either side, take on a strange pearl color, as if we were seeing in some crazy dream the fantastic action of these fabled creatures whose human traits are all turned now to flickering inclinations and fragile passions and the shadows of whims. And meanwhile the music has about it a kind of added light that shines on this laughing unreality; it is bright, dramatic; it has also, vaguely underneath its animation, something very grim and pathetic and comic and original.

Mr. Carpenter's Krazy Kat, gathering its matter here and there from our life, rises to an American commedia dell'arte. It is exciting to come upon it in that light and to see that, except for improvisation—of which it has already the quality and the possibility—Krazy Kat is so like that comedy of masks that began in Italy somewhere before the sixteenth century and ruled for two hundred and fifty years until Goldoni flowered out of it. Krazy Kat has the story, the vagaries, the music, the gesture that the com-

media dell' arte had, the action and movement also, the stream of vitality, the bouyant and incessant rhythm, the excitement of changing line, the bland cruelty and abounding love of life and of oneself, the character of being so intent upon one's own foolish and capricious and inexorable ends. As it passes there before your eyes Krazy Kat has a transparency of silly shapes and an ironical pageantry very much its own. But there is something about it of the melancholy of those porcelain figurines of the personages of the old Venetian comedy, Arlecchino, Brighella, Pantalone, Il Dottore Bolognese and their lot, whose burlesque has always so gay a gravity and whose lines are so mocking and eloquent. And yet Krazy Kat is entirely—and therefore unprofessedly and never insistently or self-consciously

—American. It is popular American material, a world of funny-paper and jazz, not apologized for or denied or made conscious of itself, but forced by an artist to yield up a profounder abstraction, to give up a quality out of itself that is more poignant and significant, to remain itself and to be more of itself, more complete, more perfect and eternal in its own kind. Krazy Kat remains jazz and adds to that a logical and beautiful musical development; it remains cartoon and popular fable, and adds to that the wistfulness and the escape of all great buffoonery, the fluttering and absurd heart of all great clowning. No American material in our theatre this season is apt to achieve a form so right or so promising as do these seven minutes of the Krazy Kat.

STARK YOUNG.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

"Journalistic Depravity"

SIR: As an ardent liberal and admirer of the New Republic's political and economic philosophy, I was profoundly astonished a few days ago when I read in the Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Volume 93, Column 1,162, in a speech by Mr. Pringle, M.P., on May 9, 1917, that Mr. Norman Angell had received on March 2, 1917, from the editor of the New Republic, "a very important journal in the United States, closely associated with President Wilson, which is recognized both there and here as more completely expressing President Wilson's views than probably any other publication," this cable message:

Can you send by cable article thousand words emphasizing value American participation in war? Now strong pacifist opposition to participation here which may be influenced by such article.

I had credited the New Republic with the social vision which rejected the diabolical methods of wartime propaganda, as a publication which disdained to stoop to the questionable practices of the venal and mercenary metropolitan press in poisoning its columns and the minds of its readers, with the virulent species of blatant and bigoted nationalism that cast the world into the hideous maelstrom of 1914. I should not have been surprised had I read in the Parliamentary Debates that the New York Times, the Chicago Times, the Los Angeles Times or some other equally violently reactionary daily had solicited war propaganda in Great Britain or elsewhere, but when I read that the New Republic had fallen to these depths of sordidness and journalistic depravity, my faith in liberal journals and liberal journalism almost collapsed.

But that is not all. Continuing the reading of Mr. Pringle's speech, I learned that Mr. Herbert Croly, editor of the New Republic, followed the cablegram with an explanatory letter to Mr. Angell; and in column 1,166 I found that on March 1, 1917, Mr. Walter Lippmann, then a member of the staff of the New Republic, wrote in the following words to Mr. Angell:

Before this reaches you you will have received a cable from Croly, the editor of the New Republic, asking you for an article that we could print immediately. We have had an exceedingly hard time in this country dealing with the pacifists who simply want to avoid trouble, and we feel that an article from you justifying America's entrance into the war on liberal and international grounds would be an immense help to us. . . . As a matter of fact, you had more influence than any other one Englishman I can think of in preparing the background of ideas which would convince Americans now in power of the necessity of their taking an active role in the war.

These words are from the Mr. Lippmann who is known in some parts of the Pacific Northwest, at least, as an advocate of social justice, political equality and an intelligent public opinion based upon facts, pure and unadorned. Since reading the foregoing cable message and Mr. Lippmann's letter to Norman Angell, only a part of which I have quoted here, I am seriously wondering how sincere are the New Republic's professions of belief in enduring principles of political justice and international peace, and just how strong is its advocacy of unbiased media of information for the general public.

RALPH C. JOHNSON.

East Seattle, Washington.

[As I understand Mr. Ralph C. Johnson, he considers the quotations from my correspondence and Mr. Lippmann's correspondence with Mr. Norman Angell as the last word in "journalistic depravity" and as in some way a betrayal of the "principles of political justice and international peace." In answer I can only confess to what he takes to be my depravity by wondering, as I now do in print, what in the world he is talking about. I see no reason to be ashamed of my cablegram or Mr. Lippmann's letter to Norman Angell. If Mr. Johnson considers them examples of depravity, all I can say is that he and I use that word differently.

Early in March, 1917, it was still doubtful whether President Wilson would answer the German submarine warfare against neutral commerce with a declaration of war. The New Republic had already advocated a declaration of war by the United States with the proviso that American intervention should be conditioned on an attempt to obtain from the Allies consent to the kind of peace which Mr. Wilson had outlined in his recent speech to the Senate. This policy of conditional intervention was repudiated by many American liberals who opposed the entrance into the war by this country under any conditions. The editors of the New Republic liked and respected many of these protestants and regretted the difference of opinion with them. We hoped to win some of them over to our own view, and the cablegram to Norman Angell was sent as part of an attempt to present this view to them in a more persuasive form. Knowing as I did that Mr. Angell was in favor of American intervention, provided it was conditioned on an attempt to bring about a peace of reconciliation, and knowing also that his words might carry weight with the people whom we desired to persuade, I sent the cablegram and Mr. Lippmann wrote the letter which Mr. Johnson quotes. The policy which we were advocating may have been erroneous or even depraved, but I cannot understand why it was an example of journalistic depravity to ask Mr. Angell to write an article for the New Republic in support of a proposed decision by the American government, in which he and I both firmly believed.—H. C.]

German Milk Rationing

SIR: Mr. Hueffer, in his article, The High Cost of Losing, in your issue of August 30th, says that the German child "cannot get milk—except of the canned variety. The farmers have very little milk to sell . . . and for what they can sell they can get any price they care to ask from the new-rich." I have read this passage with surprise, because I was in Germany this summer and was particularly struck with the efficient rationing which made it impossible for hotel-guests to obtain milk beyond a very small modicum of condensed milk even with their morning coffee, because all the fresh milk was reserved for children and invalids. The cities I visited were Frankfurt on the Main, Eisenach, Weimar and Dresden. I should have said that this rule was enforced in all of them, but as Mr. Hueffer writes from Frankfurt, my memory must be at fault. It was sufficiently widely and strictly enforced, however, to make a strong impression upon me and my travelling companion, especially in contrast with the entire lack of regulation in Vienna, Prague and Buda-Pesth.

Zermatt.

LESLIE HOPKINSON.