

A Trio of German Novels

THE MAN WHO CONQUERED DEATH.

By FRANZ WERFEL. Translated by Clifton F. Fadiman and William A. Drake. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1927. \$1.50.

THE FIFTH CHILD.

By KLAUS MANN. Translated by Lambert Armour Shears. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. \$1.50.

THE DAYS OF THE KING.

By BRUNO FRANK. Translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

JUDGED by its literature, Germany, with the possible exception of Russia, is the only nation to have profited spiritually by the recent war. The literary work of the new Russia is still too little known to enter into the discussion. But of western nations Germany alone seems to possess a group of young writers of major quality who have made a definitely new and positive contribution to world literature. In France the empty negations of dadaism and *surréalisme*, the equally empty affirmations of the quasi-Catholic revival, and the charming chatter of Paul Morand and Valéry Larbaud, have left the pre-war veterans Gide and Valéry, in possession of all the permanent honors; in England also, with few exceptions, the best of the post-war literature has been written by the older men and in the older style; in America the pin-pricks of repression and the absurdities of our political and social life have aroused the spirit of laughter, gay or grim according to temperament, rather than any more profound reaction. But while the victors in the recent war have revealed themselves in their literature as nervous, unstrung, not a little bewildered and helpless at the turn of events, the vanquished seem to have emerged spiritually stronger, more firmly knit, more deeply defiant of adverse fate. Young Germany has doffed its sentimentalism without putting on the garb of cynicism. In the work of its newer writers, however individually divergent, there is a community of fearlessness—a probing of tragic issues which is more like that of the older Russia than of the older Germany but done with an esthetic austerity alike un-Russian and, hitherto, un-German.

The three writers here reviewed differ greatly in style and choice of theme, yet Till, the unvanquishable rebel of Klaus Mann's "Fifth Child," is the own brother of the hero of Werfel's "Goat Song," while Werfel's doddering Fiala, the "man who conquered death," is a brother of Bruno Frank's doddering but unconquerable Frederick the Great. The characters of all three writers are moved by forces more powerful than themselves; all are but partially revealed, giving a sense of unplumbed depths within them; all are splendidly isolated, standing starkly against a dark background of nothingness. In each case the realistic technique is exalted by an undefinable, pervasive mysticism. In each case the self-consciousness of the writer leads him to attempt what might easily have proved a mere *tour de force* of technical cleverness but for depth of passion and high seriousness of thought.

Werfel's "The Man Who Conquered Death" is the most implacable study of dissolution since Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilyitch." A poor, broken-down old watchman whose only dignity rests on his memories of better days, is stricken with pneumonia and will lose the life insurance for his wife and epileptic son if he dies before his next birthday. That critical date is January fifth, and it is now only the middle of November. Day by day we follow the progress of the disease; long before the first of January the doctors have given up their patient; his pain-wracked, disfigured body presents only a ghastly semblance of a human being; but something lives on in him,—call it "will," call it "a complex," call it "God,"—which does not consent to die until the appointed day is past. The pictures which the book brings before the outer eye are at the beginning sordid and at the end hideous; only to the inner eye are they suffused with beauty. For Anatole France's formula of "pity and irony" Werfel substitutes "pity and respect"—but his attitude can be learned only inferentially, not directly from his style which, at least in this instance, is one of iron objectivity.

Klaus Mann, son of Thomas of "Buddenbrooks," is a gentler spirit than Franz Werfel in whom a vein of savagery lurks not far below the surface. "The Fifth Child" starts almost as an idyll of childhood

—the simple story of the life of four delightfully imaginative children of a dead radical philosopher, and of their pale, beautiful, uncomprehending mother who is neither imaginative nor radical and who, having never understood their father or learned the meaning of passion, spends her days calmly, sweetly, still unawakened. Into their quiet existence comes a young disciple of the philosopher, whose free adventurous spirit wins first the hearts of the children, then that of the mother, but never yields his own. Pursued by the despairing love of this woman of forty, he acquiesces in her desires, then departs, still free. But the coming of his child, her first child of love, brings fruition to her spirit, and the fifth child makes her a real mother for the first time.

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Bruno Frank can probably say more in less compass than either of the other two writers. In fact, the three slight vignettes of the aged Frederick the Great which make up "The Days of the King" are as characterization worth the whole of Carlyle's elaborate three volumes. The experience of reading these sketches is almost as impressive as meeting their hero in actual life must have been. Little enough happens: in "The Lord Chancellor" Frederick dismisses a minister; in "The Cicatrice" he talks with an old friend; in "Alcmene" he reviews his troops and then hastens to Potsdam to the corpse of his favorite dog. But the dismissal is an unjust way of establishing justice for all Prussia: Frederick takes advantage of a plausible allegation of corruption to get rid of a really incorruptible man whose traditional loyalties nevertheless stand in the way of a necessary revision of the legal code; and the incident enables Bruno Frank to bring before us in matchless manner Frederick the Great as he appeared and as he was—slovenly of dress, shrill of voice, unkingly of speech, yet determined to be a beneficent god to his subjects whom he despised. The talk with an old friend tells the story of his sex life and gives Frederick's own Freud-like interpretation of his career. The merciless review of troops in a frightful downpour with Frederick, cloakless, shivering, ill, sparing neither others nor himself, is an unforgettable rendering of the martial spirit; the dénouement of Frederick weeping bitterly over his dearest friend, a dead dog, is a masterpiece of tragic irony. Bruno Frank's small volume is packed so full of characterization that one might spend pages in discussion of it. The incidents are fictitious, but the Frederick whom it reveals is the real Frederick of the historic "Letters"—complex, contradictory, intellectual, passionate, skeptical, and brave—a great man and a fascinating great man. The book is appropriately printed in an old French type of much beauty, and it is unusually well translated. The publishers announce that it is the first of a whole series of recent German works about to be published in English; if the others are equal to their harbinger it is safe to say that this will be the most important serial publication of the coming year.

Portrait and Chronicle

OUR MR. DORMER.

By R. H. MOTTRAM.

New York; Lincoln Mac Veagh, The Dial Press. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARY ELLEN CHASE
Smith College

IN these days of the subjective and egocentric novel when *Weltschmerz* is put to rout by the anguish of the individual and a kind of pining disillusionment serves at once as motivation and conclusion of the whole matter, one is refreshed and cheered by so objective, solid, delightful, and altogether satisfying book as "Our Mr. Dormer." Mr. R. H. Mottram obviously does not belong to that brood of Calibans, who, taught language, profit by it only in knowing "how to curse." There are far too many of them among us. He is concerned, first of all, with painting a portrait for the sake of its worthy and captivating subject, and, second, with relating that subject to the century in which he lived his submissive, resolute, and tenacious life.

And what a portrait it is,—full, whimsical, accurate! That which hung in the hall of Doughtys' Bank one hundred years after Mr. Dormer's day is but a pale reflection of the living Mr. Dormer, presented for our delectation by Mr. Mottram, who, reminiscent as he is of both, contends for high honors with Arnold Bennett of "The Old Wives'

Tale" and with Charles Dickens. Mr. Dormer on that morning in 1813, standing on the steps of Doughtys' Bank in Easthampton, unmindful of the "senseless, nomad wind," the "watery, uncertain sun," Mr. Dormer at his dinner, "a slight reminiscence in his attitude still of a laborer eating bread and cheese, seated on a tree stump, but amply at ease in his elbow chair, masticating slowly and solemnly, looking at nothing," Mr. Dormer asleep with the fitful sun shining and fading on his head. Leisurely, careful, and satisfactory as is the latter half of the book, which part presents Mr. Dormer's son and grandson, it holds no pages equal to these that paint and chronicle Our Mr. Dormer himself. One reads them a second time and yet a third, regretful of their passage. Mr. Dormer, "a man of peaceful habit but English to the core" defends by a deadly weapon the honor and credit of Doughtys' Bank at midnight on the coach from London. He attends in pages memorable for their loveliness his wife's funeral at the Friends' Meeting House in Dog Lane. Again for the sake of Doughtys' Bank he suffers ignominy and ridicule at the most charming of Water Parties, to which, as the Doughtys' cashier, he has no entrance. And finally, when in an unforgettable scene he has been rewarded by the Quaker brothers and bankers with a virtual partnership, he goes home to his dinner in Middens Alley without any outward sign to his associates that he is in the least excited.

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But Mr. Dormer is more than a portrait. He is the embodiment as well as the symbol of that Quaker tenacity, calm, and almost paradoxical vision upon which was solidly built the English credit system of the nineteenth century. Hence his portrait and those of his son and grandson are in a larger sense the history of provincial banking in England; and Mr. Mottram's book, quite aside from its charm as a story, is a valuable chronicle of English economic history.

Mr. Mottram's style, to use two of his favorite adjectives, is leisurely and sure. His thoughtfulness and accuracy in choice of words are fit subjects for rejoicing in these times of careless and hasty composition. His delicate use of concrete detail is sparing enough to be more appreciated when it is used. One will remember "those rather ethereal lime trees" that grace the little yard leading to the Meeting House, the gleaming dish-covers and "snoring fire" in the old kitchen in Middens Alley, the drifts of garden scents trailing "in the general atmosphere of hay and sunshine." Let us trust he will use his divining-rod again—and as soon as may be!

Art and the Octopus

SIXTH ANNUAL OF ADVERTISING ART.
New York: The Art Directors' Club. 1927.
\$8.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

I WAS weaned on the first book of the international poster, in the days when Penfield was Penfield and Phil May, even, was Phil May. I can remember the designs of Grasset and somebody's spectacular cats. No, I don't mean Oliver Herford's—these were French cats, masterpieces of design in black and white. I recall reproductions of Parisian theatrical posters of high kicking black silk-stockinged ladies in a surf of nether undergarments, in the days when legs were a treat,—all sorts of wicked Parisian posters of the masked He and She, with a Beardsleyish imp leering around the corner. I can remember being the proud possessor of some of Florence Lundborg's rarely charming posters for Gelett Burgess's *Lark* published by Doxey in San Francisco . . . The Old Gentleman interested in Illustration shows his Medals. . . .

Today illustrators are legion and posters are no longer confined to advertising the theatre or an occasional old family standby like Pears or Ivory Soap. And billboards are only a paragraph in the whole story. That earliest book over which as an inky schoolboy I pored fascinatedly in idle hours built lots of its most animated designs around the bicycle. Well, they still bicycle in England, and I still love the idea of a bicycle; but it is completely off the hoardings. You might as well plan your space to include the leg-o'-mutton sleeve.

Today, to judge by this handsome volume before me, even a painter like Ignacio Zuloaga takes a hand in the great American game; not that the famous did not stoop to the poster of old! Etienne Drian

shows us a pink, bobbed-haired young thing at her toilet table making use of Woodbury's facial soap. Veteran magazine illustrators like Fred Gruger, Henry Raleigh, Rea Irvin, C. E. Chambers, and William Oberhardt lend a hand. Rockwell Kent sets William Blake at the service of modern jewelry. Elizabeth Shippen Green paints a leafy picture of a child in a treetop and sells it to Fleischmann's Yeast. Dorothy Hope Smith's infants, and gorgeously executed infants they are! were chiefly introduced through the medium of advertising upon which the great in art affect to look down. Oil, water-color, pastel, the fine flower of modern photography, every medium, every accomplished technique, is directed toward impressing the ultimate consumer with the value of some particular product. The art departments of the agencies contain men of ideas who know good painting and good drawing. The men of paint and pencil themselves respond to the possibilities of design that lurk—well, even in a frying pan or a fruit-cake. For proof, turn to pages 44 and 45 of this book and contemplate the arrangements by René Clarke. More purely poster effects may be studied in such conceptions as that of Herbert Paus, on page 41, celebrating Certain-teed building materials. And there is always Leyendecker's extraordinary treatment of fabrics in his brilliantly lifeless pastels.

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This "Sixth Annual of Advertising Art" presents the "copy" of the "lay-outs" chiefly as subordinate. Others have grown lyrical over modern advertising "copy." I am a mugwump concerning it. I only know that I once found it amazingly hard to write. It is a form of writing that, at its best, demands great skill. When you are confronted by such seemingly uninspirational material as a Radiola Super-Heterodyne, a hotel, a bank, a truck axle, an Oshkosh trunk, you will hardly plumb the possibilities of making the ordinary person's mouth water until you have had quite a good deal of practice. "Writing copy" is by no means as easy as it often looks.

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The spirit of the painting, drawing, and photographic side of modern advertising is well expressed by W. H. Beatty in his foreword to this book. He says, "you cannot measure this book with your mind standing still. It represents something that is moving too fast for that. And let us not worry too much where it is going so long as we find it high spirited and free." I, indeed, find a great deal of this graphic material high spirited and free, an ocular satisfaction and a proof that advertising, strange as it may seem, is today one of the most intelligent patrons of the contemporary draughtsman and the contemporary painter. Oh, I know all the other side of it, too! I know the groans of the galley-slaves, I know the tales of tyranny and stupidity and time-serving. I know all about Pegasus in pound and Ariel at the beck of Caliban. But I should not be a bit surprised if the future mammoth city of many levels, of architecture of colossal thrust and mass, boasted great new posters coruscant with colors to satisfy a Gauguin, or presented shapes of beauty, serving advertising uses, that might bring tears to the eyes of a Brancusi. If that seems perfectly terrible,—it is at least not so very improbable; for the huge, parasitic, preposterous, megaphonic octopus (I rather like that "megaphonic octopus"!) of National Advertising has at present an undeniable grip on graphic art, reaching avidly with its tentacles in every new direction. And yet, as this book demonstrates, in many instances it has fostered truly beautiful creation. We look at a remarkable still-life photograph, and then we lament that it came into being only to decorate a screed concerning Fostoria, Fine Crystal, and Decorated Glassware. Are we entirely reasonable in this? In all epochs art has been created for patrons and for pay. Advertising has its ogreish aspects,—admitted; and we have had plenty of enjoyment out of "kidding the life out of it" of late years; and my own social theory would make it over into a proceeding with entirely different purposes. But meanwhile (to leap lightly from simile to simile) we possess some few pearls excreted by this blind oyster,—this "poor, patient oyster," in Keats's phrase. Well, that, at least, is something to be thankful for!

The BOWLING GREEN

An Adventure in Pink

THE 9.09 P. M. is the in-between train on our miscellaneous old Oyster Bay Branch. It is too late for the usual troop of commuters; too early for the smarter sort who have stayed in town for dinner and theatre. When you change at Jamaica and board the smoker of the steam train you find it populated with artisans whose provenance and employ I am ignorant to identify. Seemingly they are on their way home from Long Island City; most are of a Polish or Slavic cast. Occasionally one well heated with industrial alcohol will want to show you his new gold watch; otherwise they sit silent, each absorbed in the pink pages of an evening tabloid. The car is bright with those tinted sheets, fallen petals of this cabbage-rose of journalism are thick underfoot. These weary citizens in their thick brown overcoats brood attentively over the three topics of Sport, Murder, and Love Nests which are staple in the tabloids. It is odd to watch their hardy and seamed and simple faces—very tempting to the pencil, some of them—fixedly conning the evening potion of anaesthesia. It is a merely muscular massage of the cortical area, inducing no wickedness of thought: pure anodyne, such as some other readers find in detective novels or O. Henry.

Hasty judgments are rash: therefore I tried to halt the thought that pricked me as I saw all down the car that perspective of pink folios. It was this: that only the things not worth recognizing are immediately recognizable. For it was easy, even for short-trajectory vision, to see what they were reading; but there was one younger man, of a studious type, who had a small red book I would have given much to identify. It looked rather like one of the little Temple Shakespeares, but I couldn't be sure. He read it only fitfully, not with the slow and earnest perusal of the hoplites.

But I tried to medicine my too prompt opinion. Journalisticum sum, I said to myself; nihil journalisticum me alienum puto. And I picked up one of the pink 'uns and studied it carefully. The Love Nest story that was riding high that evening was very disappointing: the details were meagre indeed, and I reflected on the fact that the populace everywhere and always exists chiefly to be gulled. For if it is Love Nests that they want to read about, or Murders, or Prizefights, alas it is to literature and not to the tabloids that they would have to turn. Suppose that the little red book the young man was reading had been *Antony and Cleopatra*, how surprised our honest Pollocks might have been to be told how much more melodramatic and thrilling it is, and how much more sprightly, than the liveliest tabloid. I thought with pleasure of the wittiest line of indecorum in Shakespeare, which occurs in that play.

I proceeded through an account of liquor smuggling, which threatened a huge scandal because this particular bootlegger was said to have among his customers "all the most prominent people in New York." There seemed to be some failure in logic: anything that is being done by all the most prominent people can hardly be a scandal—except as regards the law that makes such subterfuge necessary. With that curiosity about the actual minutiae of life which is so reprehensible I presently found myself studying the Classified Ads. I learned that girls you can get a free marcelle, manicure or hair cut, all day long, at the Niles Beauty School. That, I suppose, is how the apprentice operators get their practice. I learned how many openings there are for hostesses in Night Clubs, for chorus girls "experience unnecessary." Young Ladies over eighteen are wanted to act as dance partners at "New York's most beautiful ballroom," on 125th Street. And then, in among these flashes of the night I found a little announcement that said something like this:

Do you like to get letters? Join our
Correspondence Club and have friends everywhere.

This got me. I felt myself hooked. A man with any sense of shame, considering the pile of overdue correspondence on his table at home, would

have averted his eyes from temptation. But in admiring the great pageant of humanity's doings there need be no sense of shame. That very night, in a somewhat debased orthography, I wrote:

Dear Friend, I seen your ad in the N. Y. C. Graphic and I certainly am a great one for writing letters and receiving same send me your full information and oblige
Mr. C. Mosley.

Now it should be stated that in my simplicity I had had no very definite idea as to the nature of this Correspondence Club. I had supposed that perhaps, for a small fee, the name and P.O. box number of the scribophilous Mr. C. Mosley would be forwarded to various other great ones for writing letters, from whom he would presently receive the surcharge of their enthusiastic penmanship. I had simply, as did Louis Stevenson in his childish dream, "heard the sound of pens writing." The inwardness of the scheme had never occurred to me. I was the more surprised to receive, promptly among the Christmas mail, the following dulcet mimeograph. At the top of the page were two little hearts, each transfixed with an arrow, and then:

Dear Sir:

We believe you will enjoy your membership in our Club, and also appreciate the fact, that we are about to count you in our vast number of life long friends, because we shall do our utmost to bring you to a happy station in life.

Look over the Magazine carefully—note that all our work is clean and dignified—and that Magazine is published, for the one purpose, of making lonely people happy—and not for advertising in-respectable and indecent merchandise.

Should you not see the exact type of lady desired, listed in our Magazine, will say,—that is no reason why you should not join at once, as every day, we receive from 5 to 10 new Lady applicants, and also have many lady members who are in the Private Class—for which we must Personally select suitable gentlemen correspondents, privately.—So do not hold up your application, but send in at once,—telling us just what type of a companion you desire. It will be to your advantage, to do so, as we have so many desirable ladies, of all ages and circumstances,—located in every State and Canada—"From the Golden Wheat Fields of the Great North West—to the Balmy shores of Sunny Florida."

You made a wonderful start my friend, when you wrote for our Literature. Act On It, My Dear Sir. Our Registration fee for membership, is, at the present time—reduced from \$5.00 per year to \$3.00 payable in advance. We have no charge after marriage.

Then we will look for your application by return mail, telling us just the type of "A Sweet One" you desire. Thanking you again for writing, and the opportunity to serve, we remain,

Well, of course this took me right back to O. Henry's perfect story on this topic—"The Exact Science of Matrimony"—in that most amusing of all books "The Gentle Grafter." And I fear that the Follow-Up desk of the Correspondence Club will lament the defection of the impulsive Mr. C. Mosley. But he would have been less than human if he had not looked over the list of Lady Members (enclosed with the letter) offering themselves as correspondents. "Widow by death" is a frequent description of their status, and a great many seem to be members of a sorority unknown to me, the Order of the Eastern Star. I am glad to observe also that often they show a sound prudential instinct. For instance—

Refined American widow, Protestant, age 42, 5 ft. 4, wt. 116, sweet disposition, very congenial and affectionate, lover of home, can drive a car, musical, good singer, excellent housekeeper, am very lonely. Would like to hear from gentlemen of good morals and owning a car.

Another interesting phrase that occurs frequently in these little self-portraits is the description of one's religion as Golden Rule. There is one lady, age twenty-six, who is "considered handsome, high cultured, College and University education, speak seven languages, very little English (but can learn easy), Registered Nurse, play violin, fond of home, best housekeeper, will answer all when stamp is enclosed." S316, from Connecticut, is more game-some: "stylish and charming American lady, 36, 5 ft. 4, wt. 138, golden brown hair, blue eyes, jovial disposition, Baptist. Will exchange photos with a good looking, jovial man. Object pastime and what might follow."

Something cheerfully Western emanates from S.250 of Texas: "Honest upright girl, good natured and peaceful, good form, no beauty, but nice looking, American, age 19, 5 ft. 5, wt. 140, auburn hair, blue eyes. Will make some good man a true Pal."—The only one of these ladies who mentions a taste for books is an Illinois widow, age 60, wt. 185. But it would certainly be worth the \$3 registration fee to write to some of them and find out what they read. Does anyone want to undertake the inquiry, purely in the interest of sociology?

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.