

A Panorama of Russia

THE UNFORGIVEN. By GENERAL P. N. KRASSNOFF. Translated from the Russian by OLGA VITALI and VERA BROOKE. New York: Duffield & Co. 1928. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

IN "The Unforgiven," the really astonishing General P. N. Krassnoff, continues the story he told in "From Double Eagle to Red Flag"—proceeds, that is to say, from his panorama of crumbling Imperial Russia on into the early years of the Revolution, the White counter-offensives, and the bewildered, nightmare lives led by the shipwrecked "bourzhooy" in their struggles to find footing in a new world.

General Krassnoff is not a creative artist, in the sense in which that phrase is applied to a Joseph Conrad, for instance. He appears to be, rather, an active soldier, who has lived and seen much, has extraordinary visual memory and emotional vitality, and out of these qualities and his own experiences contrives to make something which, at its best, bears almost the same relation to life as fiction of the first rank. His panorama of the crumbling empire, in his earlier book, with all its gaps and unevenness and occasional slips into quite lurid melodrama, did, nevertheless, have a sweep and breadth and variety, which recalled the Tolstoy of "War and Peace." It was easy enough to pick flaws, but the thing actually did have a vitality and bite compared with which the usual run of well-made American fiction seemed the mere dancing of marionettes.

If this sequel does not have quite the quality of its predecessor it is for the very natural reason that General Krassnoff is getting further away here from the more vital days of his own life, from the things that he loved and still hopes to restore, and further into the psychology of the émigré, and to the distant consideration of things he hates and hopes to see destroyed. A desperate homesickness, implied rather than expressed, hangs over the whole book. It is the hopeless nostalgia of a former Russian officer who undoubtedly himself believes, as he makes one of his characters say, that the

social life of mankind must be organized on simple lines. The simpler they are, the happier will the people be and the better and easier will they arrange their lives. A Czar in heaven who directs and coordinates the forces under him, and a Czar on earth who rules his subjects. When there is a Czar, there will be no more of this abominable squabbling of parties, and this hateful hurry-scurry will cease. Then it will become possible to work, and incompetence will disappear.

But because this simple and medieval creed lies at the bottom of General Krassnoff's thinking and feeling, the reader must not jump to the conclusion that his story, as it actually runs, is the mere embodiment of any such political argument. He is much too much of an artist, too sensitive to the flavors and complexity of life, for that. It pictures life in Moscow, Petrograd, the Crimea, and on the White Army fronts, the moral struggle of the ex-officer who accepts a commission in the Red Army, and of the son who fought against him, of the girl who saw youth slipping away from her unless she deserted her own men for those of the new order; émigrés in Berlin and the Argentine, and the macabre antics of Russian refugees selling their uniforms, dances, folk songs and other "picturesqueness" for the tips and patronizing applause of foreign cabarets. All this and much more, and through it all that persistent, brooding note of homesickness for the old Russia—for the old order, as an understandable arrangement of the universe, and the dignity and beauty that were there as well as obscurantism and backwardness; or for some chance-remembered atom or mood of that old life, if it be only the smell of a country-house.

In so far as his longing for what is gone and his hatred for what has destroyed it, turns the author into the apologist—however unconscious—his story suffers. It is not as "good" as the earlier book. But it is always interesting, and General Krassnoff's fictional treatment of what, in large part, must have been somebody's actual experience, gives his novel value as part of the history of the time.

According to a report from Rome, Professor Trombetti, of the University of Bologna, has discovered the key to the deciphering of Etruscan inscriptions, which have hitherto defined all attempts to read them. He is to describe his discovery before the Etrurian International Congress in April. Archaeologists are maintaining in the meanwhile an attitude of "watchful waiting."

Mr. Moon's Notebook

March 1st: Just Craning Around.

The more I think of it the less I can make out of it. Last night there was champagne and today—No, no, no, don't make that pun or I shall scream! No. No. Now. Now. Easy; be easy; everything under control; tha-at's right! Light night—there was—champagne; and today—there's—Hart Crane. That's better. Now it's over. I knew it would be better. I knew I could walk around that obstacle safely; if I only took my time to it. But still—the more I think of it, the less I can make out of it. I mean Mr. Crane's poetry.

I thought I'd be sure to like any writer named Crane. I have always liked the poetry and prose of Stephen Crane and the drawings and writings of Walter Crane. But the poetry of Hart Crane—well, suppose there had been a great deal of champagne the evening before and then the next day you started in reading something like this:

STARK MAJOR

The lover's death, how regular
With lifting spring and starker
Vestiges of the sun that somehow
Filter in to us before we waken.

Oh dear, oh dear! Keep it away! There it is coming nearer again. Humming behind its hat! You know I didn't really read that; that's just the way the words *looked* to me on the page. They make more sense than that, really; that's just the way I feel today. But I'm getting all right. Pretty soon everything will come quite into focus. I'll try again now:

THY FACE

From charred and riven stakes, O
Dionysus, Thy
Unmangled target smile.

O, thy unmangled target smile, O—O—*whooooop*, my unmangled target smile, O, o, o, o, that unmangled target smile! Oh, dear! There, I feel so much worse again. I *don't* see why I can't read the words correctly. Every time I pick up the book, though, the type on the page seems to form into things like

No more violets,
And the year
Broken into smoky panels.
What woods remember now
Her calls, her enthusiasms.

It's not a question, because there's no interrogation point. And yet it seems to be a question, and it simply breaks my whole afternoon up into smoky panels. And it induces the dangerous frame of mind that sets me to doing the same thing. I know I'm in no state; but still, we'll entitle it "Musette"; and I've got a swell first line to start off with:

MUSETTE

Let us by apples be believed;
No rainy crow
Jangling a heaven sparked with light
Can murk the orchard more;
For apples now relate, remind,
Vertumnian. . .

The neighing night
Falls to flat peace, lays gold on grey;
The rose and violet shower. . .
And this is past.

Your eyes' immediacies.
Apples incredulous of heaven.

Yes, I did that. No, that wasn't Crane. I did that. Pretty good, eh? That wasn't Crane. That was all that's left of the champagne. And here's another one too. It's even a bit better. I call it

RHETORICAL QUESTION

A dromedary dream all neck
Peered round but patient wax impressed
the die of steel. . .
Poised on a pin-point. Dark
Riddling said Paracelsus
is the illusion yet
Magammon will not miss the way
His house being bright. . .

Pretty darn deep, that one. Ha! I should say it is. A lot too deep for *you*, my good man. Yes, *sir*, that's my riddle! Yes, *sir*, taradiddle! Yes, *sir*, that's my riddle now!

I don't think poetry's such a much of a craft after all. There're two poems dashed off just like that, and Crane only has about twenty-five or thirty in his volume. I could do a book in a week. And

all as good as those I showed you. And Eugene O'Neill says Crane's poems are "profound and deep-seeking". So are mine. What do you mean by saying mine are not expressions of seeking? They certainly are expressions of seeking. They certainly are deep. Why are *they* jokes, if this sort of thing is considered with the most intense respect by Edmund Wilson in the *New Republic*:

Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes.

Why is that good; somebody tell me? And if it is, why is *this* not good? The little thing as it crawls into my head is called:

MUCKWORK

O vengeful lip
that followed lashing. I had turned
away; the fire engine
clanged through my body yet I turned
away—and then
curled vengeful cracking
like a whip.

I can just *see* those people! Can't you just *see* those people! Pretty darn good too, to stick that unexpected rhyme in at the end. Pretty daring. Then, if one wants a dash of the Continong:

APPARTENANT À L'ÉTAT

. . . and in the yellow light
barring the floor
eyes hurdling
blush-coloured flesh;
thirst whispered pool,
and yellow turned to crome;
Of Poringland
The oak
uprose. . .
Old Crome! Old Crome!
That light, that tree,
Those bathers. . .
Thirst. . .

This is obviously an expression of acute nostalgia on the part of an exiled Briton with a rather nice taste in painting. It absolutely gets me. As to where he is when he is thinking all this,—oh, well, anybody can see that he's somewhere in Paris. I'm good, aren't I? Really I'm extremely good. Three arresting poems in,—let's see,—half an hour. And I actually feel no sense of exhaustion. No, I do assure you. In fact, I'm feeling better. And just then a splendid line boomed into my head. Listen,—oh, it's a knockout,—"I smell your gas-range fears". So, let's go. I think it must be from the poem called:

APSTLY

You nudge a cornice for I could not
pursue that quenching posture if
the curdled wheat
ate into blonde exuberance
but no
no blaze of silver burnish. From the door
I smell your gas-range fears. . .

This is a bit more difficult, but as some critic has said, I "focus on the consequences of the state of mind." In the first place, it's quite apparent that I am walking along with some one with an inferiority complex. Who should it chance to be but Bill Apstly? He is always overcome when he sees a policeman; perhaps because he once lived up the river. So I note him crowding up against a building rather abjectly, and admit that nothing could make me do the same, even if—well, here we have to go back a bit in my history. I hail from Kansas. I ran a threshing machine out there all one summer. Apstly came to work on the same farm. I am a heavy man, of about two hundred pounds, with rather bright yellow hair. When I say "curdled" of the wheat, it is an expression of dislike, just as much so as if I said "that damned wheat,"—only more poetic. So now you begin to get it. Even if work in a wheatfield had destroyed my fine physique I wouldn't go around like a scared jack-rabbit. That's what I mean to say. But poor old Apstly shows "no blaze of silver burnish," i.e.: courage. No, there he is, cowering in the doorway at the mere sight of a policeman. He exudes terror like a poisonous odor of gas. See? What? Why couldn't I have told my story more directly? Good heavens, my dear person, this is *poetry*!

But that's a pretty good story about Apstly and myself, isn't it? I could work it up, with a bit more plot, maybe, and sell it to a magazine. No, when I called the poem "Apstly," I didn't know about Bill then. But I do now!

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT
(To be continued.)

A Painter of Iowa

THE BONNEY FAMILY. By RUTH SUCKOW.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

WHAT is Iowa? One of the purest land-holding communities on the face of the globe; a State of 200,000 farms; a region settled by Southerners, Yankees, and Germans, now merged into a uniform mass; a land of high literacy, diffused comfort, narrow vision, and drab plodding life; where nobody is poor, but the young aspire to cities far away and the retired farmers yearn for California; a State of mortgages, of movies, of lodges, of pervasive evangelism, of Fords, of mail-order catalogue, of prohibition, of Cummins and Brookhart. It has more telephones and eggs and autos and pure-bred hogs per capita than any other commonwealth; but a gibe by one of its sons, Ellis Parker Butler, about the comparative expenditures for manure and for literature indicates what many think of its spiritual expressions. Its largest centre, Des Moines, is a town of placid attractiveness, and it is full of idyllic nooks and picturesque streams; but it is one of the last States we associate with beauty.

Till recently it was a State without a voice. Today it has one of the best, because one of the truest, of all the literary voices of the Union. In three successive books Miss Ruth Suckow has established her position as a painter of Iowa life. Her "Country People," with its finely restrained picture of the Kaetterhenrys, adding acre to acre with dumb acquisitiveness; her "Odyssey of a Nice Girl," a study of village morticians and auto-salesmen and the girl who gave up her attempt to escape; her short stories in "Iowa Interiors"—these are among the most authentic and veracious of all records of Middle Western life. To them she has now added a fourth, worthy of its predecessors—"The Bonney Family."

What we find admirable in Miss Suckow's art are just those qualities which to many spoiled readers of our overspiced and overwritten American fiction would seem defects. Her books lack hard and vigorous coloring; they are empty of sensation; they deal with the inner springs of personality and with emotion in highly reticent fashion. Hence the lament which we hear shortsighted critics occasionally raising over the lack of drama, of "passion beneath the surface," in Miss Suckow's work. It is because of her deep integrity of purpose, of her complete command of herself and her materials, that she gives us nothing of the sort. She deals with the everyday, commonplace people of one of the most commonplace, undistinguished parts of the world. Such people are largely plastic in the grip of circumstances—they are not, they cannot be, rebels, or they would cease to be typical; they seldom figure in dramatic situations; few feel passion, or feeling it, give it adequate expression. Yet they are real people, and it is Miss Suckow's triumph that her sober faithfulness, her patience, and her penetration enable us to see their reality and to become engrossed in them. By careful detail she builds up the routine of their lives, and by a multitude of delicate touches she reveals the warmth and tenacity of their small emotions, the hold which associations of place, family, and custom have upon them, the complexities and the changes in their characters. To those to whom Iowa life is wholly foreign, her detail may seem dry; to the vast majority of Americans it should be full of interest.

Here, as in "The Odyssey of a Nice Girl," Miss Suckow has gone to a small Iowa town. But whereas in the former book the attention was centered upon a maiden who roamed to Boston in a vain search for release and then came back to Iowa, here Miss Suckow makes an entire family the protagonist of the book, and keeps the scene constantly in Iowa. For twenty years the fortunes of the Bonney family are followed. The father is the faithful, warmhearted, but commonplace pastor of a village church, who gives up his pulpit and becomes an officer of a denominational college in order that his growing children may have the benefits of education. Of these children there are four, two boys and two girls. Especial attention is paid to their development through adolescence to womanhood and manhood; to their small sufferings and joys in academy and college, and to their first elations and defeats in life afterward. Particularly do Warren and Sarah occupy the author—Warren, tall, gawky, and red-haired, whose youth is an agony of embarrassment because his schoolmates laugh at

him and he is ignored by the girls; Sarah, who longs for love and marriage and children, and who receives just one proposal from an impossible lout. Miss Suckow knows her young people. Take her picture of Warren squiring two homely girls to an unescapable party:

This family chronicle is not without its major events. Sarah's younger sister marries a soldier in 1917; her younger brother Wilfrid is killed in France; the mother of the family dies, and to the dismay of the children, the father is captured by an elderly spinster. But it is not the major events which count in the unfolding of character and in the human relationships of the people; it is the everyday details. In the end Sarah is left solitary, her father, her sister, and her surviving brother all married. We take leave of her groping blindly and painfully for some occupation in Chicago, and reflecting bitterly how life just "went on" for most of the people about her, how impossible it was to "make everything come out right." She, like the nice girl of the odyssey, finds at the end nothing but—frustration. The family has broken to pieces and separated to form new family units, and she, whose instincts marked her for a mother and wife, is left to face a sterile loneliness. Yet Miss Suckow makes no artificial climax of Sarah's fate; the ending of the book is narrated in the same even, passionless manner as all that has gone before. The emphasis upon the events throughout is as great as, and no greater than, the emphasis of life itself.

To those who do not care for the quiet, minute art of the Dutch *genre* painters or for its counterpart in literature, Miss Suckow's books will have little attraction; but in her own style and field she has produced work that will assuredly live.

Andalusian Witchery

THE GYPSY. By W. B. TRITES. New York.
Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by BERNARDINE KIELTY SCHERMAN

HERE is a story which the writer seemingly had to tell. Indeed it is his emotional fervor burning through it, that sets "The Gypsy" so far apart from the general run of present-day contrived plots and deliberate subtleties, as to startle the reader by its naked simplicity. It is the story of a weak man whose gradual disintegration of mind and soul brings him to the point of sacrificing for a sordid, unrequited passion, the only creature in the world who means anything to him—the story of an artist under the spell of a gypsy model, against a background of listless, disinterested, lazy Spain. Material that has been done and redone a hundred times! Yet here is an author telling it with all the emotion of glorious discovery. His is not a concocted tale thrown off between jobs, but a creation achieved by skill and careful artifice. He has searched his mind for the most gripping word, cast out all unessentials, yet remained ardent, fired with feeling, to the very end. The tragedy is inevitable. One lays down the book and pauses long.

The tale is in novelette form which of course contributes much to its breathlessness. It reads like a short story, poignant and highly-keyed, yet with ample room for complete revelation of characters. Mallock's killing despair goes on as steadily and irrevocably as any work of nature, and Julia, his wife, so easy to sentimentalize, emerges as a singularly beautiful conception of a plain woman of the north trying in vain to make her own unromantic *milieu* amidst "the white incandescence of an Andalusian summer." It is the author's hot conviction in depicting his people that makes these old stock figures of melodrama live once more.

Weighed against all this truth and sincerity, however, is a naïveté that may easily offend the sophisticated reader. For all its bold outline, there is a lushness in the immediate writing quite Victorian. There is what seems to be almost a school boy's love of words. "In his fashionably cut gray flannels, lean, ruddy, elegant, he gave himself up to musing . . ." "Her hair fell over her shoulders in abundant superb adulations. . . ." Some parts read like magazine twaddle. The author constantly insults by explaining foreign phrases, by pedantically describing foreign customs, worst of all, by taking three full pages out of his own short tale to retell the story of Gauguin as something quite new. Yet why should we let present day subtleties of expression and accepted reticences be our criterion in judging this book when the writer achieves his end by the very faults we quarrel with? "The

Gypsy" may have the obviousness of the old style, but it is a style perfectly adapted, not so much to the story itself, as to the "feel" of the story. And when the reader has finished—when he looks back in retrospect, he finds that all the lushness of even those first pages has become merely thick brush strokes intensifying the picture. "The Gypsy" remains in his mind—vivid, unforgettable portraiture.

I Corinthians VIII: 13

MEAT. By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE. New York. Harper & Brothers. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

IT is obvious that "Meat" will not prove palatable to the vegetarian reader, but it is doubtful if he can resist nibbling at the forbidden fare: for this third novel of Wilbur Daniel Steele has the tremendous allure of the debatable. One has only to recall the editorials, the articles, the public and private debates, the indignation and moral fervor resulting from the Bollinger Baby controversy which raged in Chicago at the turn of the century, to realize that Mr. Steele has indeed pitched his tent between the battle lines and that verbal blood is bound to be spilled. Social psychology has changed considerably since the doctor in Chicago asserted the right of humanity to destroy at birth the human offspring whose organism precludes any possibility of normal human life, yet the feeling for the inviolability of the human ego is still strong in the sons of men. It is not, with "Meat," save for a racked moment early in the story, the crude question of life for the unfit, but the much more subtle one of how much of life shall be taken from the fit to minister to the survival of the weakest.

The story proper opens on a shimmering mid-summer day, with the India family on the New England beach of the India home. The two year old "synthetic twins" are "washing around in the sea-suds all by themselves, gulping, screeching, blowing bubbles, and getting themselves tremendously spanked by combers eight inches high." The air vibrates with heat and light. The parents, Sam and Anne India, lie further up the sands,—Sam who is of the fifth generation of Connecticut Indias, and Anne Flagg India, the colorful and vital pagan "sprung from earth to dare traffic with gods," who this very afternoon sends back to a woman complaining of the starkness of the twins her gay brave message with its unsuspected irony, "Tell her that God and I are sorry, but the world was made for well people to live in, first of all." The afternoon ends in an ecstasy of relief and release with the news of Tomlin Flagg's death. This cousin of Anne's had been born—and was not the first in the Flagg family to be so born—with a tiny horn above his left ear. The horn had disappeared in babyhood, but ugly appetites and incapacities had lingered, threatening. Now that's all done with, "ended," Anne says

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How little it was ended they were to learn within the year. Anne gives birth to a son with a tiny horn over his left ear. The rest of the book tells a merciless story of corroding sacrifice. Anne, not gradually, but instantly in the second of realization, denies all her old gods, forfeits joy and straight thinking, and demands from her household the same warped immolation on the altar of the unfit. That desires which cannot be controlled may never be aroused, beauty must be banished and innocence destroyed. There is no appealing to the old Anne, because she is not there, only this hard-faced, opaque-eyed mother of a misbegotten. Ruthlessly the gracious, temperate home life is destroyed, the twins are driven to unfertile pastures, and Sam India becomes a thwarted stranger in his own house.

The disintegration of a kindly, love-encompassed family is splendidly achieved, but a last minute attempt to rebind the broken and changed members—even to so slight a degree as Mr. Steele does attempt it—is much less successful. The lyrical opening of the book, the ominous suggestion that hangs over the delicate fantasy of childhood, and the explicit horror of the main part are all boldly and definitely projected, but when the ending is approached a wavering becomes apparent. It is doubly difficult to understand why the novels of Mr. Steele should have this unsatisfactory quality in their endings, since in his short stories he is past master of crisp terminal technique. As to the authenticity of the scientific implications in the book I suppose we shall have to wait until the Doctor Looks at Meat.