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Literature in Exile.

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"The War: no more Peace"
May 22, 1938

Literature In Exile

—By Klaus Mann.

GERMAN LITERATURE IN EXILE may receive all manner of adverse criticism; as a matter of fact there is hardly a form of abuse that the Goebbels-Journalists of the Third Reich have not heaped upon it. But it cannot be said of German Literature in Exile that it is monotonous, uniform and not sufficiently varied. Naturally it is not always perfect, but it is alive and like everything alive, it never ceases to surprise.

One such surprise is the first novel of Oedoen Horwath, a young author of Hungarian descent "*Jugend ohne Gott*" (Youth Without God) published by Albert de Lange, Amsterdam. Up to the present, Horwath was known to the German literary public only as a dramatist. One of his works—"*Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*" (Tales from the Vienna Woods), which was performed at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, was awarded the Kleist-Prize. His first more comprehensive work of prose has all the mysterious qualities and charm of genuine poetic art.

Impious youth is the tragic collective hero of his book. This youth no longer has ideals or a belief—a materialistic age has robbed it of both. Fascism has not substituted an equivalent for lost piety, only a worship of might and brutality as a principle. This youth without God is not only sad, it is evil; it is cruel and melancholy. These young people have no confidence either in one another or in their elders. This hopeless and dangerous youth which Horwath has in mind and which he describes, is the Fascist youth, the youth of the Third Reich.

However, "*Jugend ohne Gott*" is entirely a work of poetry and definitely not a piece of reporting. The political tendency of the book—its accusation against fascism—can be read only between the lines. The very simple, thoughtful style has elements of the fairy tale, of the legendary. Even an exciting crime story, which dominates the surface action (a murder committed by a boy and all the complications resulting therefrom), has, for all the plastic manner of its presentation, something strangely spectral, dream-like.

The profound horror, that Horwath so well knows how to awaken in his readers, is akin to that in the stories of the German romanticists, E. T. A. Hoffman or Tieck. The criticism of the times and even the political-polemic element in Horwath's most original work of prose are

by no means attenuated in effect by the intensely lyrical form, but are rather greatly enhanced by it.



KLAUS MANN.

WHILE HORWATH REMOVES the present to a more phantom-like sphere, another highly-gifted young German romanticist, Hermann Kesten, has undertaken to vivify the ovel through the medium of modern psychology, and by presenting personalities and situations that have become almost legendary as though they were contemporary. Kesten, who of all the young German authors possibly writes the most brilliant prose, had proved his ability as a wit and his flair for moral pathos (for he is a witty moralist) primarily with modern subjects: as for instance in his novel "*Joseph sucht die Freiheit*" (Joseph Seeks Freedom) and "*Der Scharlatan*" (The Charlatan).

Only during his exile has he turned to historical themes: possibly because the present seemed to him too sad for witticisms and on too low a level to lend any meaning to a moral indignation about any detail. His great novel "*Ferdinand and Isabella*" is now followed by the voluminous tome "*Koenig Philipp II von Spanien*" (King Philip II of Spain) pub-

lished by Albert de Lange, Amsterdam. Both works have the bizarre and cruel, dignified and grotesque sphere of Spanish history as a background.

The task Kesten has set himself this time is tremendous, even I would say, overwhelming. At times it seems as though the enormous abundance of the material which Kesten undertakes to mould into narrative form, would stifle him. The abdication and the strange monastic life of Emperor Charles V; Philip's various marriages (among them his marriage to the Queen of England, the predecessor and half-sister of Elizabeth); his great love affairs, his vast intrigues, his wars, victories and defeats; the tragedies of the Infante Don Carlos and of Count Egmont; the heroism of William of Orange; the Inquisition; the secession of the Netherlands—all this is merely a random and incomplete selection of the huge complex of topics that forms the epic subject matter of this novel. Any one of these topics would be quite sufficient in itself as an underlying theme for a historical narrative of exhaustive proportions.

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THROUGH THE INTERMEDIARY of the fantastic, bewildering, breathtaking profusion of events and personalities it is always Kesten's aim to show three things: First, humanity in general; second, the horrible but triumphant EVIL, and, third, GOOD, which now and then ventures forth timidly and sometimes heroically proves its worth. The Good appears less often than the Evil, which latter manifests itself in innumerable motley and frightful, sinister and grotesque forms. The narrator—apparently unmoved, ironical, detached, at times even with a somewhat diabolical sneer—obviously wishes to convey this thought:

"You see, human beings are like that; just so blood-thirsty, just so stupid, just so ambitious, just so fanatical, just so mendacious. They have always been thus and thus they will always remain. At best they are comical; for the most part they are disgusting in addition."

This daring and almost imposing work carries within it, however, another hidden, a secretive melody; an undertone of grief, of compassion and hope; of comprehension, forgiveness—and the will to reform. And it is undoubtedly this chaste, restrained, tender pathos, this kindness and real humaneness, that endows this clever and partially admirable literary experiment of Hermann Kesten with its intrinsic dignity, that makes of the great, variegated, adventurous chronicle, a stirring human document, a poetic production.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a series of articles written from Amsterdam for the Book Page of The Post by the novelist Klaus Mann, son of Dr. Thomas Mann. The articles tell of the work being done in banishment by various German authors who, like Herr Mann and his father, have been unable to endure the Nazi regime. In a forthcoming article Herr Mann will discuss the current work of Bruno Frank, Stefan Zweig and Konrad Heiden.)