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Nach Mitternacht. By Irmgard Keun.

Mann, Klaus

August

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exclusive. Germany or any other nation could 'join the club by accepting its rules.' Meanwhile the defense of the Empire is the union of democracies in defense of peace.

BROWN TERROR

NACH MITTERNACHT. By Irmgard Keun. Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1937.

(Klaus Mann in the *Neue Weltbühne*, Prague)

THOSE of us who are fighting the Third Reich from abroad run the risk of losing contact with German realities. Of course we are still *au courant* with everything that happens in Germany and we are always ready to discover what is new not only from the press but also from eye-witnesses. Nevertheless we do lack direct contact with the German atmosphere. I don't think we are yet strangers to Germany, but we must struggle against that possibility.

A talented woman writer, Irmgard Keun, tells us how things look in the country that is so inaccessible to us today. She stood the Third Reich for a long time and knows it thoroughly. *After Midnight*, the novel which she submits, is distinguished by acute observation and is replete with vivid details. There are countless little everyday things that make us feel that we have witnessed the events she describes with our own eyes.

Miss Keun, whose first novel, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, brought her a large following, is a gifted storyteller. She knows how to present characters and the environment in which they move with such integrity that we seem to breathe the same air with them. Thus she describes a petty bourgeois home, a beer hall, or a masquerade. Everybody seems to be having a good time, so that a pair of English journalists may think that they are justified in telling their readers that one sees only smiling faces in the new Germany, but under the surface there is tension and a premonition of death.

Women often have a peculiarly keen

and incorruptible sense of observation. Vicki Baum has that quality. Irmgard Keun also has it. The terrifying and dramatic events that make up the story of *After Midnight* would have been stylized to a much greater extent by a man. The writer, however, remains serene, avoids pathos and maintains throughout the narrative a certain matter-of-fact but strongly suggestive style.

The story is told by a simple woman from a petty bourgeois setting in the provinces who speaks whatever is in her mind. As a rule, I greatly distrust this sort of trick in writing, which makes a virtue out of necessity. Too often, when a critic comments upon the slovenliness, unevenness and clumsiness of a book, the author counters with: 'Of course; but the novel should be slovenly, uneven and clumsy—it was supposed to be written by that kind of a person!' In general, I demand well-written books. But in this case I must confess that the trick is successful.

The girl who tells the story leaves her rural home to visit her brother in Frankfurt-on-Main. The brother is a writer, fairly well 'coördinated' and well adjusted to the Blood and Soil movement. But he has not been entirely corrupted. His conscience is still somewhat sensitive. Altogether he is a rather weak character and we see him sink lower and lower into the morass around him. In this brother's house and in the circle of his friends events take place which lead to the climax—to the catastrophe. The atmosphere in which these persons move is tense. It is the atmosphere partly of a prison, partly of an insane asylum. Sinister shadows loom over all the characters. Some are destroyed, others flee and gain freedom and still others become callous and degenerate. Nobody is happy. No one can be happy in a totalitarian Fascist State.

A shudder runs through us as we look and realize: 'Yes, it is so; this is the way these people live their everyday lives; this is exactly how their revels look.' Irmgard Keun has given us a graphic de-

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scription of them. We see what happens when an Aryan girl falls in love with a young man named Aaron. We see the two sitting together in a discreet little café, hiding from the prying eyes of men who guard the race against pollution.

This is an important book, just as important, it seems to me, as the famous documents about the concentration camps, the underground movement, the militant achievements and martyrdom of the German Opposition. For this is also a document, even if it is fiction. In its description of everyday life in the Third Reich we sense the truth—pitiful, shameful and unbearable. And life in Germany must continue to be pitiful, shameful and unbearable until those who see it for what it is do something about it.

ARGENTINE MOSAIC

GENTE. By Max Dickmann. Buenos Aires: Amigos del Libro Rioplatense. 1936.

(Léon Pradel in the *El Mercurio*, Chile)

GENTE (People) is the title of the latest novel of the Argentine writer, Max Dickmann. The author has parenthesized his work with the subtitle: 'Story of a Generation' and was right to do so, because *Gente* is more than a novel which merely presents a unified plot. It is a vivid picture of our epoch as seen in a big city such as Buenos Aires.

He has written in the present because, as he says, it is absurd to continue living 'with the sentimental equipment with which young Goethe had crossed the Alps.' 'It is true,' he adds, 'the fetishes of a dead culture are useless; but it provides us with a thousand talismans, a thousand new sources of mystery. . . .'

The social significance of the book, its color and its realism, are admirable, bringing to the reader things that are within his own horizon, recalling things he himself has seen and suffered.

Human passions, prejudices, egotisms and generosities, the base and the sub-

lime, are handled by Dickmann with a consummate mastery that is rarely found in authors on this side of the Atlantic. We see the aristocratic types who are chained to their names as to a title of nobility. They are spendthrifts and inordinately proud. They preserve their dignity even when their funds are exhausted, but they never abandon the 'setting' in which they were nurtured. We see the foreign money lender, typified by the ambitious and avaricious Boldini. We see him squeezing the degenerate rich into pulp by demanding payment of their promissory notes.

There is the artist son of a noble family who is inclined to Bohemianism and Socialism. He seeks food for his spirit in the company of the enlightened. He grasps the painter's pallet like another Rodolfo, but longs for the Mimi of his dreams. We meet Dodine, his sweetheart, with her French mannerisms and her longing to be worshipped, waiting hours and hours in her little Parisian style *hotel* for the powerful master who is a generous Mæcenat in love. She was willful, impulsive and insufferable while she lived in abundance and her lover had the means to surround her with luxury; later, abandoned and bankrupt, she attains true nobility as a simple seamstress, facing life with unexpected fortitude. She redeems herself like a true Magdalene.

And so in *Gente* there pass before us life and lives as if they were projected on the screen of a movie. There is the lovable and artful servant who steals cigars and whisky from his master and who enters the maid's room on tiptoe; the gentleman who coaxes the innocent deer into his arms; the first awakening of unconquerable sexual love; the life of the faithful employe and of the unfaithful; tricks, deceptions and loyalty; life, death, insanity and happiness. All these form an immense mosaic. We spend a day with humanity in a big city, with its ups and downs, its paradoxes, its mixture of smiles and tears, of truth and falsehood. In this extensive panorama Dickmann has used language

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