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"I Come from Guernica". The Children of Guernica. By Hermann Kesten.

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in conversation, with well-modulated voice, expressing careful well-bred opinions on the subject of the arts. Such a reader will remember his own impulse to break into argot and obscenity. This is exactly what Pound has done here, for 249 pages. He has published in the last ten years a number of diatribes against the casual reverence accorded literature. He now goes for reverences pertaining to the whole field of culture, including mathematics, philosophy, painting, and music. He is against the pious respect which stiffens around mankind's achievements in all fields—"the religion of culture well adapted to the emotional needs of polite societies." He is all for breaking up, throwing out, biting the thumb at, pulling the beards off, disintering, freshening, "making new." He refuses to attack moldy but sacred academic signaroles from a distance. A critic like Roger Fry, from whom Pound has learned much, is content to pin down the pretensions of philistines, culture addicts, and *amateurs*. He smokes with well-bred wit. Pound walks into the field armed with ink bombs. He fronts the "specialists," running to seed in their limited circles, with his own eclecticism, which makes free of many. He is at times shallow, misinformed, inaccurate, but he smashes his way through the fences and pulls down the walls between archives.

Pound is a provincial American who, after receiving degrees from two provincial American universities, went to Europe and never came back. He combines in himself at present two strongly marked and—*one would suppose*—completely irreconcilable types: the brilliant American village atheist, and the European dilettante to whom "novelty is a positive virtue." At the beginning of his career, sick to death of the hangovers from the English nineteenth-century critical and artistic values then infusing American poetry, he determined to exhume poetry from the grave into which scholars and moralists had lowered it. He was after poetry in all languages, poetry of all ages. The preface to "The Spirit of Romance" (1910), "a book which never had a public," announced this ambition. Recently he has added a passionate belief in the theories of Major Douglas to his belief in pure poetic values. He is now a soldier of an Economic Faith Militant, as well as a fighting aesthetic. His unexpected jumps between these poles of his enthusiasm, his uncontrolled and frequently hysterical attempts to link the two passions together, his tub-thumping for Mussolini's planned economy make it a simple task to cull ridiculous and half-baked statements from his text. Certainly Pound has few disciples at present, and every critical observer has had a period of disliking his methods. The only way to be fair to a man who, in spite of all his faults, has spent his life cutting away dead wood in the sacred grove is to read "Guide to Kulchur" with an eye alert for its virtues rather than its defects.

"Great literature," Pound has said, "is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." One of the sternest of Pound's English critics has admitted this statement to be "a very good corrective to the academic and general habit of discussing literature in terms of Hamlet's and Iamb's personalities, Milton's universe, Johnson's conversation . . . and Coleridge's or Shelley's private life." In contrast to academic failure to see, or acknowledge, the human vigor at the center of language art and thought, here are some sentences from Pound:

In my student days no senior had the faintest feeling of Dante's interest, Shakespeare's interest in living. . . . The history of culture is the history of ideas going into action. . . . You can write history by tracing ideas, exposing the growth of a concept. You can also isolate the quality or direction of a given time's sensibility. That means the history of an art. . . . Properly, we should read for power. Man reading should be man intensely alive. The book should be a ball of light in one's hand. . . . I suspect that the error in educational systems has been the cutting off of learning from appetite. . . . How to see works of art? Think what the creator must have known and felt before he got round to creating them. . . .

Sharp judgments, wrong insistence, and, although this is rare, lack of ordinary common sense lie scattered about on these pages. On the other hand, the book is almost completely free from *literary rigors*—except, of course, economic ones. What is lacking is the increasing mellowness and the real, as opposed to hysterical, breaking through into new thought one expects, not entirely sentimentally, from a seasoned artist of fifty. Pound's original substance has not been tough enough to go forward, in spite of and through struggle, into great originality. His taste for the obscure and the esoteric have ultimately weakened his gifts. He likes to fiddle around: to translate Latin translations of Chinese ideograms into English; to put a phrase of Aristotle's, in the original, under a Chinese character. (But it must be remembered that the only interesting and profound discussion of Chinese ideograms in English comes from Fenellosa, through Pound.)

All sorts of memories of Pound's real services in clearing up the aesthetic-moral muddles of the last thirty years must be referred to while one reads this book. And two sentences might be added to its title page:

To express anything at all is a crime with the philistine; to express anything vital is a crime with culture.
(Roger Fry.)

I am trying to use not an inch rule but a balance.
(Erna Pound.)

LOUISE ROGAN

"I Come from Guernica"

THE CHILDREN OF GUERNICA. By Hermann Kesten.
Alliance Book Corporation. \$2.50.

AS GROWN-UP people behave like madmen and act like wild beasts, children, in comparison, acquire the dignity and wisdom of philosophers. They are the innocent, pathetic victims of fanaticism and brutality, and staring at adults with horror, they ask: "Why are you so crazy? Why must you be so wicked?"

In this book, writing in the first person, Hermann Kesten, an exiled German author in Paris, meets a lad who like himself is a refugee. As writers by profession are bound to be curious, Kesten is eager to hear the life story of the young stranger. The boy begins his narrative in a quiet manner: "My name is Carlos, and I come from Guernica. My father had the chemist's shop on the market square. He was the best man that ever lived."

The tragedy of Carlos and his family is the tragedy of the

Spanish people. Life in Guernica, the Holy City of the Basque country, used to be calm and pleasant. The chemist was happy with his wife, Señora Pia, and with their children, who had such beautiful names—Carlos, José, Ghil, Inocentia, and Modesta. They loved their mother and adored their father. But the idyl was disturbed by the sudden arrival of Uncle Pablo, an adventurer. Many years before, there had been a serious quarrel between Father and Uncle Pablo, and the two brothers had not seen each other for a long while. Now Uncle Pablo comes back and makes trouble. He is impudent and cynical and rather witty. He amuses and frightens the children, and starts to flirt again with Señora Pia, who had once been his fiancée.

The civil war, the tragic fight between brothers, has its prologue in this private sphere. The family in Guernica is not at all concerned with politics; it demands only a certain amount of personal freedom and comfort. The civil war, when it comes, strikes them as an unintelligible catastrophe, like a thunderstorm or an awful disease. The Spanish children with the fine romantic names have to watch and to do revolting things. Some of them even get involved in a murder, and little Inocentia loses the right to her lovely name. Life becomes a nightmare. The sinister, naive, and moving report of young Carlos reaches its unforgettable climax with the description of the notorious bombardment. For the children of Guernica it means something like the end of the world. The mysterious, ruthless enemy destroys their homes and their city, brings death to two of them and to the good father, "the best man that ever lived." However, Señora Pia and Uncle Pablo succeed in escaping to France with what remains of the family, as does Carlos, who gets separated from the others.

But the flight to France was not the last adventure of the family. The story goes on like a baroque fairy tale, almost overcharged with odd events and absurd complications. Matters become still more confused when the lost son, Carlos—in Paris called "Monsieur Charles"—finds his mother, who is living with his cynical Uncle Pablo. The latter finally abandons the poor woman, going away with the attractive wife of Carlos's generous French host. Carlos, for his part, quarrels seriously with his brother José, because both of them have fallen in love with the same girl. It is all a half-tragic, half-comic mess. Carlos tries to commit suicide, and when he fails comes to important conclusions about how to continue with his life. He decides to become a writer, confident that he may communicate essential truths by telling of his past experiences.

Hermann Kesten, author of several brilliant novels and literary essays, often seems to laugh about serious matters. Sometimes the reader almost gets the impression that the author approves of Uncle Pablo's cynical ideals. But in reality Kesten is a moralist disguised as a grim joker. His book is neither bitter nor frivolous; is it frivolous to notice the grotesque elements in a tragedy? There are plenty of reasons, these days, to cry about human beings, and to laugh at them. The moralist in exile, whose face is wet with tears and distorted with painful laughter, utters with a touching sort of de-late enthusiasm the words of Beaumarchais's Figaro: "I'll be joyful! Who knows if this world can endure another three weeks?"

KLAUS MANN

Seeing Real New York

CHANGING NEW YORK. Photographs by Berenice Abbott; Explanatory Text by Elizabeth McCausland. A Publication of the Federal Art Project. E. P. Dutton and Company, \$3.

HOW superior to the usual romantic view book of New York is this book of photographs by Berenice Abbott! It is a book that literate people will wish to own and enjoy at their leisure. The stock thrillers of the gravure sections showing "Manhattan magic" are conspicuously absent. There are no views from the R. C. A. Building toward the harbor through the gloaming. There are not even, as in Mendelssohn's "America, Picture Book of an Architect," which seemed exciting ten years ago, any tall slit-like pictures to show tall slit-like canyons, nor is there any special opacity in the shadows that the skyscrapers cast on the slums.

It is a sober book, superficially matter-of-fact. Miss McCausland's captions, based on the work of a WPA research staff, gain their interest through their detailed and specific narrative. The straight photographic technique is of a kind which the camera-club enthusiasts for filter and angle shots will find old-fashioned: as in the newsstand guides, when you look at a skyscraper you can count every window. Quite evidently Miss Abbott, who has devoted ten years to seeing and photographing New York, has been in no hurry, has taken her pictures not as a tourist but as one who lives there.

The effect is like walking through the city on a slightly cloudy Sunday. These days of modulated light tell so much more than the days of exhilarating sunshine, which dazzles you with half the view so as to blind you to the rest. And the detailed facts, keenly observed, build up to more in the end than "effects" do. Miss Abbott's composition, rich in content, have a delayed power. Sometimes this is magnificently epic and tragic, as in that incomparable view of the Henry Street tenement wall against the skyscrapers of Park Place. Once it sings right out, in the breath-taking glimpse of the downtown towers through the rigging of the schooner Theoline. Again, there are the times when a film Abbott simply plants you in front of a Bowery sidewalk hardware display, where you can count—and price—the endless array of common articles, such as knives, paint brushes, and electric heaters. Then there is the contrast between the handling of the thumping old downtown Post Office (since demolished) with its funny pretentious columns, and the sudden discovery, presented without comment on the next page, of delicacy and refinement in the arabesque of an utterly unpretentious "Lebanon Restaurant" window.

Does this suggest with what skill, and what fresh delight for the eye, the artist has let the facts arrange themselves and recreate, through design, the city's fantastic story and its innumerable moods? The book has its own salt, too. Sometimes the fun is purely graphic, as in the three-fingered composition for the Flatiron Building or the African stripping of the Triboro barber school; sometimes it is of subject matter, as in the grave picture of Lafayette on Union Square, addressing himself so gallantly to the "best-dressed women" of the huge sign of that not modest merchant, S. Klein.

This first book of New York calls for more. The real city