

## RUSSIAN FEARS

The Soviets and the Next War. By R. D. CHARQUES. Secker. 3s. 6d.

Mr. Charques has done a valuable service in this discussion of a danger which everyone has heard speak of but few trouble to think about. Anybody who has been to Russia, or read the Russian newspapers, or talked with a Communist knows how universal and how deep-rooted is the belief in a "capitalist war" against the Soviets. We may pooh-pooh it or remonstrate. But the belief remains unshaken, and Mr. Charques explains why, and he also explains how the defensive measures engendered by this war-psychosis affect Soviet policy.

The Communists, it must be admitted, have substantial practical grounds for their fears. The wars of intervention, the civil wars, and the attitude of the western Powers in the past ten years have seemed to point all one way. The enmity and the ambitions of Poland, the darling and the tool of France, Bessarabia shelved but not settled, the sinister activities of Japan, Hitlerism in Germany, the "imperialistic" interests of Great Britain in the East—any of these might set the spark to the gunpowder. And facts are heavily reinforced by theory. Does not the Marxian analysis show that war is the inevitable outcome of the crisis of capitalism? Economic nationalism must fight international socialism, and in a world armed to the teeth it will not be a paper-fight. We may question the soundness of the Communist reasoning, and we may deplore such a fatalistic attitude; but we cannot deny the dangers, either in the general or the particular. Nor is it of any use—indeed it is childish—to pretend that the Soviets themselves have aggressive designs. They believe, no doubt, in world revolution—or at least they do lip service to it. But war, whether in the west or in the east, would upset their domestic apple-cart—and the apples, be it remembered, are of untold value. They will not fight unless they are forced to it. It may be, as Mr. Charques suggests, that their obsession and their inflammatory propaganda at home and abroad actually enhance the present danger, and even create a risk of "the intense nationalist ardour of the masses of the Soviet Union spilling over in a critical hour."

But to-day there is certainly no will to war either in the masses or in their rulers. They want peace, and they want as a guarantee of it complete disarmament all round. That, of course, they will not get; it remains to be seen whether the Geneva Conference will result even in any reduction of armaments worth talking about. Mr. Charques is emphatic on the importance of disarmament. It is, he says, the sole remaining protection against war, and—writing before the opening of the Conference—he hopes to see Great Britain taking the lead in proposing a radical scheme of reduction. Alas! he has learned by now that Sir John Simon and his colleagues in the National Government are not cast for that role. But, in any case, will a reduction of armaments by, say, 25 per cent., desirable though it may be, go very far to allay either the fears of the Soviets or the general risk of war? "The problem of peace in Europe," Mr. Charques himself declares, "is essentially a problem of international economic agreement and co-operation." It is the reduction of debts and tariffs and the rest of our nationalistic mischiefs—moral and economic disarmament, in short—that is wanted. By all means let us scrap battleships and submarines and big guns and poison gas. But that alone will not remove causes of friction with Russia, nor ensure the friendly commercial and diplomatic relations that are so urgently needed.

C. M. L.

## SHORT STORIES

The Spanish Omnibus. Trans. by WARRE B. WELLS. Eyre and Spottiswoode. 8s. 6d.

The Black Boxer. By H. E. BATES. Pharos. 7s. 6d.

Several Occasions. By MARY BUTTS. Wishart. 6s.

Kiss on the Lips. By K. S. PRICHARD. Cape. 7s. 6d.

Storm. By PETER NEAGOE. Paris New Review. 4s.

Christmas Formula, by STELLA BENSON; A Terrible Day, by DAVID GARNETT; Green Thoughts, by J. COLLIER; The Wild Swan, by L. O'FLAHERTY. Fumival Books. Joiner and Steel. 10s. 6d. each.

Two Studies. By H. H. RICHARDSON. Ulysses Press. 2s.

The Tithe Barn. By T. F. POWYS. K. S. Bhat. 10s. 6d.

Most publishers will tell you that volumes of short stories are unpopular; and yet it is hard to meet intelligent people who, if

they read fiction at all, are not as glad to find good short stories as good novels. To-day the well-written novel, whether hand or machine-made, is commoner than it was thirty years ago; while the first-rate short story is comparatively rarer. In all these volumes there are but few tales that could rank with the best fiction now being written; but the little there is that is of very high quality has a formal beauty very rarely found in the novel. It is the kind of beauty that Miss Stella Benson achieves in her novels, and has not quite reached in the three tales in this volume, two of which are written in that mood of sardonic farce which, in her novels, is used only to accentuate her sense of life's cruel aimlessness. Miss Richardson's stories of death are, in their grave acceptance, of a rare and permanent loveliness; and there is a queer force and naked craft in Mr. Neagoe's tales of Central Europe. His vivid, staccato prose is surprisingly masterly for a foreigner's; and the direct contact he has with simple people makes his work contrast happily with the tales of the cafés and the studios which are too often all we get from the Par-American writer. Miss Prichard's stories of Australia, especially in her treatment of the natives, are among the most remarkable work that has come from that continent. Her manner is as restrained as her subjects are often violent; all life seems reduced in intensity by the desolate spaces of the great plains, and all force goes into the continual fight with an ungrateful soil. Even the terrible story of Rosie, the "gin" who throws her baby away, is moving only as a dream-tale is moving. Of the other contributors to the Fumival books none is quite at his best. Mr. David Garnett cannot write badly; but his story has a kind of angry exacerbation that interferes with the cool, objective criticism of life which we enjoy in his best work. Mr. O'Flaherty's three stories are good but not excellent examples of his talent; and Mr. Collier's tale of the orchid that fed on its owner, his cousin and his cat seems to me a very unsuccessful exercise in the earlier manner of Mr. Garnett. I cannot leave these books without congratulating the publishers. These volumes, with their good paper, fine printing (by the Chiswick Press), and illustrations by good artists are models of what a limited edition should be. There are only five hundred copies, signed by the authors, for sale; and at the price they must be some of the cheapest books produced for the discriminating collector. Mr. Bhat has much to learn from them; his edition of two characteristic stories of Mr. T. F. Powys, poorly printed on indifferent paper, is worth scarcely a fifth of the price he asks.

It is hard to see why M. Barbusse was asked to introduce the anthology of Spanish stories, translated excellently by Mr. Warre B. Wells. Barbusse writes with distinction about the relation between politics and literature in Spain; but his essay will be of little use to those who seek for literary information or aesthetic criticism; and Mr. Gorkin's biographical notes on the authors, though useful, are quite uncritical. Of the authors represented in this volume the best known in England are Ibáñez, Unamuno, Baroja, Azorin and Ayala (the present Spanish Ambassador at St. James's). There is a romantic simplicity still in Spanish fiction. The authors here represented are not afraid of clear colours, sharp contrast and quick outline. The directness of such a story as Cenecha Espiza's *The Friar Minor* is as keen as the heat of the Spanish sun or the glare of the plains. This is a much more national book than would be a similar volume of English, German, French or even Italian stories; those who like Irish literature will find here the same realism, the same defiant other-worldliness mixed at times with an astonishing baseness. There is a deeply religious atmosphere in Spanish art, whether the makers be Christian or anti-Christian; and that accounts for the depth and richness of many of these stories. There is the same sense of the beyond, breaking very tenderly into shoots of surprising loveliness, in Mr. Bates' best work. In his new volume he includes some stories such as *The Hessian Prisoner* and *Charlotte Esmond* that have already appeared separately in limited editions. He still has a certain intellectual frailty; he is so sensitive that at times he will not venture beyond an insinuation, when statement would be more appropriate. This volume will add to Mr. Bates' reputation.

Will the publication of *Several Occasions* make a few people realise how incomparably Miss Butts has grown in stature since her story *Speed the Plough* was acclaimed as a masterpiece—is it ten years ago? She is a perplexing, at times an exasperating, author. One of her best essays in fiction—*Ash of Rings*—has never been published in England; but *Armed with Madness*, its successor, came out, and fell, so far as I know, deplorably flat. People still ignore her work when they criticise modern

novelists. That should be impossible now that *Several Occasions* is published. Some of the book is trivial, no doubt; but Miss Butts' triviality has a devastating quality, a dry triumph of acieidie that make it seem terrible, rather than futile. *The Dinner-Party*, *In Bloomsbury*, and *Friendship's Garland* are stories which, if the generation to come shows any curiosity about our society, will take their place beside *The Waste-Land*, *The Poor Man* and *These Barren Leaves* as documents of revelation. There is one story at least which has an accomplishment, a clinching perfection that very few European authors could match. *The House-Party*, in its dreadful lucidity, exposes the soul of a damned, useless, perverted creature in a way that makes the reader see that there is something beyond damnation—just as Ibsen forced us to see that in *Hedda Gabler*. Miss Butts portrays, with a mordant economy, the insolence of a certain type of Englishman, especially when he is "abroad," as are the agonists of *The House-Party*; and she can give us an evil sketch like something of Toulouse-Lautrec's.

For some days before, as well as for some nights, Vincent had observed a shadow about the quays. First because it had tried to sell him an obscene book, then because it tried to sell André an obscene book, then because it tried to sell everybody an obscene book. Then because it was obscene. Of no race or of any; grey, green, greasy, with a few horned teeth and black nails; its clothes a patchwork of hotel leavings, its speech a kind of American, pronounced with a lisp, the chi-chi of the East. Referred to as the Pimp. It knew a whore-house, a cinema. Lived by finding people who wanted these places. Found them. Of no age. Probably an immortal.

With an effortless effect of necessity Miss Butts works out the tragedy of Paul whom Vincent would rescue, whom the Pimp somehow strangely recognises and claims as his own. It is an amazing story, in which the terror, the disgust are somehow conquered by the pity which is never allowed to cloak our vision of them.

R. ELLIS ROBERTS.

**One Lives to Tell the Tale.** By EDMUND GILLIGAN. Cape. 15s.

The essentials of this story were related to Mr. Gilligan, an American journalist on *The New York Sun*, by one of the few survivors of some three hundred prisoners of war who broke from an internment camp on the outskirts of Cape Town and trekked North. Most of them perished on the way; dying of wounds, sickness, hunger and thirst; but seventeen won through. The story is mainly concerned with the original narrator and his companion, who in two years marched across Africa from the Cape to Cairo, and there, swimming the canal, were captured by Arabs and conveyed to German headquarters somewhere in Sinai. It would have been a great adventure in peace time, in war time it sounds incredible. Yet it is hard to disbelieve a narrative so seemingly sincere, and so authentic in little details. It would have been better, however, for a few dates and footnotes; for the escape of three hundred men must have been an event of some importance.

**Allan Ramsay: A Study of His Life and Works.** By BURNS MARTIN. Oxford University Press. 11s. 6d.

Although Ramsay's pastoral comedy *The Gentle Shepherd* once enjoyed a great vogue, its author's fame rests mainly on his collections of Scots poetry, apart from which he is now read little enough. Mr. Martin's study is largely given to examination of disputed biographical details and the tracing of variant versions and performances of the play. As a critical estimate the book is perfunctory; Mr. Martin appears to be held back, first by a distaste for displaying any enthusiasm, and secondly by the fear of treading on the heels of former critics. Thus, while duly noting Ramsay's faults as poet and editor, he derives no joy from the humour and simplicity to be found in him. Nor does he go far with the exploration of Ramsay's place in literature. Rightly denying *The Gentle Shepherd's* influence on *The Beggar's Opera*, Mr. Martin ignores a converse possibility that Ramsay's play owes something to Gay's earlier pastoral *The Shepherd's Week*. The poet's influence on Burns is not even summarised, because a German critic has discussed it. Even his importance as reviver of the Scots vernacular is, as it were, left for granted.

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