

RUSSIAN WOOD ENGRAVERS



"ON THE CAUCASUS FRONT." WOODCUT BY PETER GAMBAROFF

SOME RUSSIAN WOOD ENGRAVERS. BY P. ETTINGER

"À QUELQUE chose malheur est bon" says a striking French proverb, which is often quite justified by the course of events. To the extreme misery which has befallen Russian typographic art of late after a period of brilliant development, together with the great lack of zinc and the enormous cost of process blocks, is due an unexpected revival—or rather amplification—of wood engraving in Russia, and especially in Moscow. Wood and linoleum cuts have been extensively employed instead of metal blocks in line or half-tone for all sorts of work—book-covers, illustrations, the posters so profusely used by the Government and its Committees, and also for sets of views of

Moscow and its environs recently published in portfolios, including a large one with many prints presented recently to members of the Third "Comintern" Congress. Most of these prints are not of high artistic value, but happily some really gifted artists have been led to practise the art with more assiduity than formerly.

Prominent among them is Vladimir Favorski, who on one side is of English descent, his maternal ancestors being the Sherwoods who settled in Russia some generations back. Favorski worked for a time under Konstantin Yuon and afterwards in Munich, where he first took up wood engraving, though painting was his principal medium until the wood-block through force of circumstances claimed his almost exclusive attention. He has proved himself a genuine master of original style and individual faculty. All along he has worked as a true wood-cutter, concerned only with the strong, telling line and vigorous contrasts of



VIGNETTE FOR A MUSIC SCHOOL PROSPECTUS. WOODCUT BY V. FAVORSKI.



INITIAL LETTERS FOR A BOOK BY ANATOLE FRANCE. FROM WOODCUTS BY V. FAVORSKI

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"MARIA KRIVOPOLIENOVA
FOLK-TALE RECITER"
WOODCUT BY P. PAVLINOFF

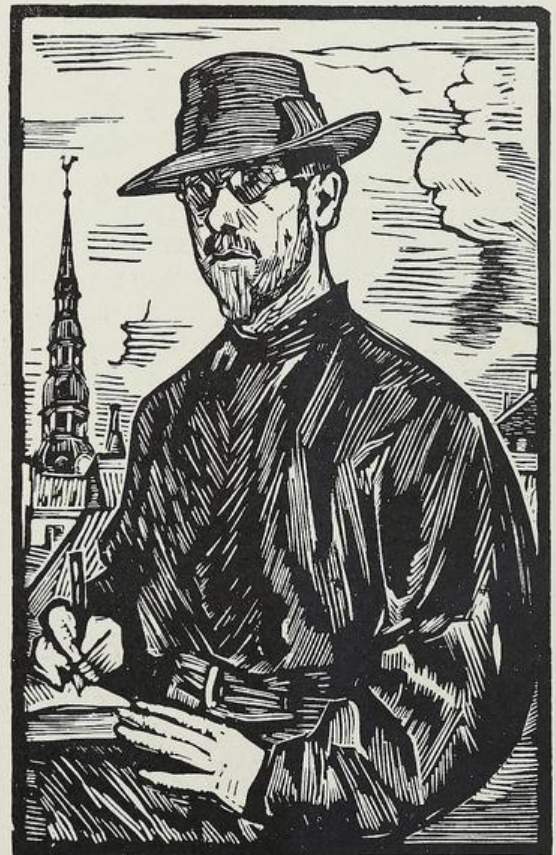
black and white so dear to the old masters, but his work is quite modern in character. In 1918 he executed four views of Moscow which show his individuality. A view of the Troitsa Monastery done the following year reveals a tendency to more intensive large black planes on white paper, and this new manner appears also in his illustrative compositions at this date, of which the vignette reproduced may serve as an example. His further work consists chiefly of illustrations. A commission for a series of initials for a Russian translation (not yet published) of Anatole France's "Les Opinions de monsieur L'Abbé Gérome Coignard," enabled him to show his talent as a skilled compositor fully acquainted with the demands of book-illustration.

Favorski's friend, Paul Pavlinoff, formerly a naval officer, also studied at Munich after a course at the Petersburg Academy. He first attracted attention by some fine etchings, and only during the war took up wood engraving. His chief

strength lies in his portraits, the best being one of himself, the falling buildings in the background being intended to symbolise the idea of the old world tumbling to pieces which then (1918) prevailed in Russia. The strained expression of the face may serve as a *document humain* of that tragic period. The portrait of an officer is a reminiscence of the artist's war service, while the wrinkled old woman represents one of the few surviving reciters (*skazitel'nitsi*) of the old Russian "bylinas." The *Sleigh with Coffins* is one of a series of scenes in Russian every-day life. During the epidemics such scenes were common in Moscow.

I do not know much about the career and work of Peter Gambaroff. He spent a long time on the Caucasian front, and his woodcuts give views of its picturesque cities and scenes of military life.

Standing somewhat apart from these three artists is Vassili Masutin, now living at Riga, his birthplace. He is one of the

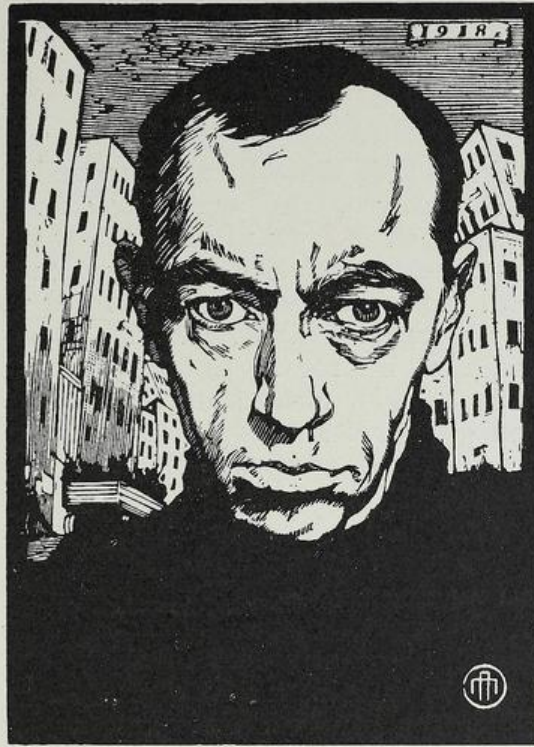


"SELF-PORTRAIT." WOOD-
CUT BY V. MASUTIN

RUSSIAN WOOD ENGRAVERS



PORTRAIT OF A RUSSIAN
OFFICER. WOODCUT
BY P. PAVLINOFF



"SELF-PORTRAIT." WOOD-
CUT BY P. PAVLINOFF

most prolific of Russian etchers, and the fantasy of his themes and his brilliant execution have given him a peculiar place in modern Russian art. It was the dearth of copper that led him to try his hand at the wood, and he has succeeded here also. Besides his auto - portrait with Riga

Cathedral in the background, his chief work is a series of about twenty illustrations for his own romance "The Days of Creation," not yet published, the best of them being, in my opinion, some realistic scenes in which he has achieved some very decorative and penetrating effects. ▯



"SLEIGH WITH COFFINS"
WOODCUT BY P. PAVLINOFF