

AS OTHERS SEE US

THE MARX BROTHERS ABROAD

STARTING in vaudeville, graduating to musical comedy, and culminating in the talkies, the Four Marx Brothers have now become international celebrities. In 1931 their next to last production, *Monkey Business*, made more money than any other picture of the year and now *Horse Feathers*, a burlesque of American university life, is having a great success here and abroad. The British, with characteristic aplomb, have adopted the Four Marxes as their own, and the high-brow columns of the *New Statesman* and *Nation* recently contained the following tribute from Francis Birrell:—

Though *Horse Feathers*, like other Marx pictures, consists of a series of culs-de-sac, it has a unity of speed and tone that we do not find elsewhere. The wise-cracks might, with advantage, be still further diminished, for the dialogue is still too important in itself. It is an obstruction, not a signpost, to the development of the picture and reminds us again that the Marx Brothers learned their technique on the stage or in the fair. They still remain, somewhat excessively, stars who do their particular stunts in rotation and would make the clown's direct appeal to his friends in the audience. *Horse Feathers*, in fact, still wavers. Nevertheless, as a picture, if nothing else, it is the best thing they have done, and leads one to hope that one day they will produce a really good film, instead of only a really good entertainment. To do this, however, they must forget their origin and perhaps sacrifice a good deal of their immediate popularity.

This popularity is indeed a curious phenomenon, and one cannot but wonder

how much of it is genuine or, at any rate, intelligent. For they appear to me far the most advanced thing that has been put upon the screen. I do not mean merely that they are crude, and frankly vulgar, the only film artists in Europe or America that do not make some appeal to sentimentality. Rather I mean that the very nature of their humor is so autosuggestive in its sequence, so apparently disconnected, so purely subjective, that it would, I should have thought, have been unintelligible to more than 'a small and Pharisaical minority.' But presumably *surréalisme* has a direct appeal to the majority, which I should never have expected. The Marx Brothers films and *Palmy Days* are the only *surréaliste* pictures to have a general release, and they have all been great successes. (As a picture I am inclined to rate *Palmy Days* higher than anything done by the Marx Brothers.) But presumably the English have a genius for appreciating this sort of thing, and indeed they invented it. Lear is too purely literary to have any particular connotation with screen aesthetic. But *The Hunting of the Snark* really does look like a Marx film.

The Victorian culture of Carroll has been soured by the beastliness of a Fascist generation into the anarchy of a Marx film. But still they do both seem to be part of the same movement and the popularity of each is a matter of interest. The amusement that lies in pointless and motiveless pursuit lies at the bottom both of the *Snark* and the Marx Brothers, and pursuit in one form or another has been at the bottom of most good film work. We see it in Wild West films, in gangsters, in Charlie Chaplin, in René Clair, in Fairbanks, and many others. The Marx Brothers invented nothing new here; but they gave an old *motif* a new twist when they introduced the psychological dis-

turbance that is caused by seeing something that is mad and aimless, like the activities of the Banderlog, or at any rate something which, if not utterly disconnected, depends for its connections on the workings of the unconscious. In trying to be as old as clowns and as new as *surréalistes*, the Marx Brothers have landed themselves with a problem they have never completely solved, though they have come nearer to solving it in *Horse Feathers* than in their other pictures; and perhaps if they will forget themselves, scrap most of the interlude on which they depend for their immediate response, in fact, turn into a set of unpopular and self-conscious high-brows, they may really produce a work of art that is in tune with the sensibility of the age. And perhaps for the reasons suggested above, because of Lear, because of Carroll, they may eventually win both an artistic and a popular triumph—at any rate in England.

Mr. Birrell's reference to *surréalisme* is a happy one, for the French critic, Philippe Soupault, who used to be prominent in *surréaliste* circles, has also indorsed *Horse Feathers* in *L'Europe Nouvelle*:—

One often feels as if one were looking at the show in a deforming mirror. The comedy of the Marx Brothers lifts us out of reality by exaggerating our peculiarities and aggravating our habits. We are neither shocked nor vexed by this caricature, but astonished to recognize ourselves. All our usual gestures become mechanical and we laugh, we laugh at ourselves. But the real quality of the Marx Brothers and of their extravagant, excessive comedy remains human. They are exactly like ordinary people and act just as we should act if social regulations did not prevent us from behaving in that way.

Their latest film not only possesses comic dialogue that is heightened by picturesque New York slang, it not only achieves comic situations, but it is over

and above everything else a human comedy. This comic cocktail makes their new film a kind of masterpiece. I believe that though most films rapidly go out of style this satiric comedy will make us laugh for a long time to come. It can be shown after years have passed and there is a good chance that it will make us laugh then as much as it does now.

It is a strange fact that America has a monopoly of comedies. Neither the Germans nor the Russians nor, to an even greater extent, the French succeed in turning out such really profoundly comic films. What pictures can be compared with those of Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers, even with those of Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd? Thanks to these comedies the American cinema does not expire. It seems that this vein is inexhaustible. The last production of the Marx Brothers leads us to believe that the American film, in spite of its faults, can still save itself and thanks to this fantasy enter upon a new life. For comedy and, still more, fantasy, enable it to make discoveries, to escape from the stereotyped, and to abandon the beaten path.

BURNED CHILDREN

WHEREAS a burned child is reputed to avoid fire, mature Americans who are burned on the stock market never lose their desire to speculate. Theodor Emanuel Gugenheim Gregory, professor of banking in the University of London, who visited the United States last summer and fall to attend the Williamstown Institute of Politics, has returned to England with some discouraging opinions about what America has learned from the depression. Here is the way he expressed himself in the columns of the *Spectator*:—

Whereas in previous visits I had been impressed by the willingness of American

business men to discuss the idea of a planned economy, by the almost universal interest in Russia, and by the beginning of a sympathetic interest in problems of unemployment insurance, I was on this occasion impressed by the rapidity with which such intellectual preoccupations had fallen into the background as soon as it seemed as if the corner had been turned. I left the United States on this occasion with the very definite impression that Americans as a whole have learned nothing from the depression, that the next heavy outbreak of speculative fever will be as bad as the last, and that America as a whole does not want a stabilized world. What people do want is a rising stock market in which they can recover some of the losses of the past. Nothing is more striking to an Englishman, in the present phase of the world depression, than the almost complete absence of any rational discussion in the press of the problem and the magnitude of unemployment. Definitely Republican papers may well prefer to avoid problems of this kind in an election year; but I failed to observe any general preoccupation with these problems anywhere in the East. I am told that this was not the case last winter or this spring. If that is so, it shows how quickly public opinion can change.

A FRENCHMAN WATCHES OUR CAMPAIGN

HENRI DE KERILLIS, influential Paris journalist and deputy of the *Bloc National*, reported the progress of America's presidential election in the columns of the reactionary and clerical *Écho de Paris*. Here is what he had to say about the use of publicity:—

What does political passion signify in a new country with no history or tradition where the population is made up of successive layers of foreign émigrants so different from each other and so com-

pletely uprooted from the original surroundings that once determined their individual states of mind and sentimental preferences? What does political passion signify when the choice is between two men who are so much alike, both members of the upper middle class, both social conservatives of the puritan type? What does political passion signify when two parties present platforms that are so similar even on the great question of Prohibition, as well as on the tariff, toward which the Democratic attitude can hardly be distinguished from the Republican? What mysterious force is brutally impelling into a single political arena crowds of Mid-Western and Far Western farmers and turbulent, city-dwelling masses who are as remote from each other as London is from Vienna, Paris from Moscow, Berlin from Rome?

You know the answer—the mystery of publicity. This is what sets in motion formidably violent but artificial and superficial political currents that suddenly, for a brief moment, run through the whole country in every direction.

Cinemas by the hundred thousand enable people to see and hear Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Hoover talking to them familiarly. Innumerable radio stations scattered throughout the whole American empire carry the voices of Mr. Hoover and Mr. Roosevelt to the humblest log cabin and to the hundredth story of the skyscraper. More than twenty thousand newspapers inundate the country with campaign literature. There is nothing about Mr. Hoover and Mr. Roosevelt we do not know. We are told the least of their desires and gestures. They cannot blow their noses without our knowing whether their handkerchiefs are white or blue. We know all about their wives, their children, and are told how many times a day their little dogs sit up and beg. Finally, the names and pictures of these great men line all the streets. We find them in shop windows and, in the open country, displayed in private houses. They go

promenading on automobile radiators, on men's lapels, and on women's dresses.

The unfortunate thing about this scientific, systematic, and omnipotent publicity is that it robs the election of much originality. There are few public meetings organized at the last minute in the local schoolhouse or anywhere else, as is the case in our country. There is nothing of the variety, humor, and occasional odiousness of our struggles. There is nothing of the house-to-house canvassing that is so picturesque in England. Across vast territories two grave gentlemen, each of them backed up by half a dozen other grave gentlemen, bombard each other over the radio with speeches as boring as the rain. It is indescribably monotonous.

STIMSON, JAPAN, AND WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST

WITH the namesakes of the Hoover-Stimson doctrine in Asia headed for private life, and with the star of Hearst in the ascendant, considerable timeliness is attached to the following editorial from the *China Weekly Review*, an American-owned periodical published in Shanghai:—

We have no way of knowing what adjectives the Japanese use in their native-language newspapers in referring to Col. Henry L. Stimson, United States Secretary of State, but they apparently have almost worn out their English dictionaries in the search for expressive terms for use in referring to the author of the new international doctrine of nonrecognition of stolen territory. In last week's issue of the *Review* we reprinted a reference from the official Japanese newspaper, *Manchuria Daily News*, published at Dairen, wherein a Japanese writer referred to the 'vague; meandering, aimless gabbles anent Manchuria by the present-day occupant of the White House and his Secretary of State.' Then there was reference to the 'rainbow

theories' of the Secretary of State and considerable sarcasm about his 'quibbling over verbose documents,' and words to similar effect. In addition to the verbal bombs hurled at Secretary Stimson, the Japanese cartoonists have also had considerable sport. One cartoon depicting him in sailor garb appeared in the English edition of the *Osaka Mainichi*. The heading over the cartoon read as follows: 'In Difficult Position—Col. Henry Stimson's Far Eastern Policy Up against a Wall of Unpopularity—Even the American Journals Are Poking Fun at His Peculiar Diplomacy.' Under the cartoon was published a long telegram from Takeo Ohara, Japanese correspondent in New York for the Osaka paper, who apparently derived much joy from a cartoon and editorial attack on Col. Stimson that had appeared in the Hearst newspapers. In describing the Hearst cartoon the Japanese correspondent said Col. Stimson reminded him of a man hanging from a slender branch of a tree while beneath him was Japan in the form of a crocodile awaiting with 'big open mouth' to devour him. The dispatch also referred to the recent visit of Senator Reed to Europe as President Hoover's emissary and declared that Senator Reed's alleged success in lining up Europe in favor of the Hoover-Stimson policy in the Far East 'is greatly minimized if not completely discredited.'

The Japanese newspapers have derived great satisfaction from Hearst's attack on the American Secretary of State, Hearst now being regarded as Japan's outstanding friend in the United States. At the meeting of the Tokyo Privy Council when the decision was made to recognize Manchukuo, a high Japanese diplomatic official was called in to report on the status of world opinion with respect to Japan's present activities in Manchuria. After surveying sentiment in the various countries of Europe, the diplomatic official informed the privy counselors, the cabinet officials, and the Emperor that William R. Hearst was Japan's chief friend in America.

THE GUIDE POST

(Continued)

original, and penetrating view of the world. He has lately been visiting a Greek son-in-law of his and brings back some upsetting descriptions of how Greek hosts feed their guests. Although the quantity and quality of the food that he was forced to consume may be peculiarly Greek, the shabby-genteel bourgeois setting in which he was entertained is as universal as the family picture album.

A GERMAN visitor to Mount Athos who took residence among the monks and studied in their libraries describes the physical surroundings, the daily routine, the historic background, and the character of the men who now choose the religious life. Even in such a holy spot he finds the same skepticism that exists in the outer world, but he also evokes an atmosphere that has little in common with most of our modern institutions.

CORNELIA SORABJI is the daughter of an Indian Christian minister. She attended Oxford, studied law, and was appointed in 1904 by the Government of Bengal as legal adviser to the Court of Wards. She has written a book on *Love and Life behind the Purdab* and has contributed short stories and articles to the British and American press.

A PURITAN ERA of proletarian art has come to an end in Russia at precisely the same time that the peasant is being allowed to sell some of his grain on the open market. Dr. Richard Lewinsohn describes the official encouragement that is being given to a 'brighter Moscow' movement, in order to release some hitherto suppressed impulses and to help make people forget the material miseries of a bitter winter.

ANOTHER GERMAN student of Russian life reports on the new turn in Russian

literature in greater detail. It seems that Soviet critics have divided post-revolutionary literature into three five-year periods—the first a period of revolutionary exaltation, the second an objective period dominated by Tolstoi, and the third a subjective period dominated by Dostoevski. Russian writers believe that their immediate task is to master individual psychology.

THE FIRST of our two 'street scenes' also has a Russian background. It consists of an interview between a German visitor and a nine-year-old schoolgirl who has received orthodox Communist training. When her generation comes of age the world will see a new feminine type compared to which the present Soviet women will look like so many Jane Austen heroines.

BUT Moscow is not the only city where youth is in the saddle. Richard Hülsenbeck, who has visited many foreign lands in recent years, describes modern Constantinople, where the schoolchildren make speeches to the mayor while their parents listen in fear and trembling. Herr Hülsenbeck encountered on his way into the city a representative modern Turk whose fate illustrates some of the shortcomings of Turkish modernism.

WE OWE our readers an apology for the article, 'Outshining Mata Hari,' by H. Berndorf, that appeared in our November issue. We made our own translation from a current issue of *Vu*, only to discover after it had appeared in print that the same material had already appeared in the United States in another translation as part of a book entitled *Espionage*, published by D. Appleton. But if our readers are as ignorant as we were, perhaps we do not owe them an apology after all, for now they know that they can find in *Espionage* more adventures as exciting as those of the redoubtable Fräulein Doktor.

WAR AND PEACE

WAR should no longer be the source and subject of rights, we all agree, but, in truth, the law of nations at times resembles a system of philosophic anarchy that works very well if there are no lawbreakers but in times of stress and storm puts the good or weak at the mercy of the bad or strong when all are not conscientious and law-abiding. Unless great nations are prepared to make their mandates effective by force, such mandates are a mere moral obligation, for no system of law in the true sense can exist without some external power to enforce it.—*Chief Judge Cubbert Pound at the dedication of Myron Taylor Hall, Cornell University.*

It is truly strange that those who most criticize the League for weakness are the very ones who most resolutely oppose strengthening it. Happily the logic of facts is stronger than the passion of men, and facts are working more and more every day to convince peoples that they can have peace and prosperity only by accepting a better international organization.—*Nicolas Politis, Greek President of the League of Nations Assembly.*

If the will not to tolerate war expresses itself still in diverse formulas it is from now on common at least to all civilized nations.—*Édouard Herriot, French Premier.*

Advance, work and, if and when necessary, fight.—*Motto for next decade of Fascist régime, by Benito Mussolini.*

Germany demands now as then that other countries reduce their armaments to a level that, with consideration for each country's particular situation, would correspond in the end to the measure of armament imposed upon us by the Treaty of Versailles.—*Adolf Hitler, German National Socialist leader.*

War being outlawed, it is logical that he who wages war shall be deprived of the economic aid without which adventures of this kind could get nowhere in the modern world. It is necessary at the same time that it be known in advance that any result territorially or otherwise obtained by violation of the Briand-

Kellogg Pact will not be recognized by the body of civilized nations.—*Joseph Paul-Boncour, French War Minister.*

Regaining the liberty to use and develop Germany's creative forces is the aim of German nationalism. That is what I mean by nationalism. It is not one that will lead toward war but toward peaceful, spiritual competition that will benefit all nations alike.—*Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, former president of the Reichsbank.*

Almost everywhere in the world the foreigner is no longer looked at with amused and sympathetic curiosity; every one looks at him not as a possible friend but as a possible competitor. Such a state of mind is bound to change if the world is to avoid dangerous clashes.—*Paul Claudel, French Ambassador to the United States.*

It is not infrequently said by alarmist papers that a war between the two countries [Japan and the United States] will come, or may come. But, however warlike a nation may be, no country will fight its best customer; common sense prohibits that.—*Dr. Inazo Nitobe, member of the Japanese House of Peers.*

It would be utterly inconsistent for the League or any other organization or any nation that respects world peace and the doctrine of self-determination of peoples to attempt actions that would tend to alter unnecessarily already existing international relations, thereby shadowing the future of the 30,000,000 inhabitants of this land and further complicating the world situation. Any such attempt we vigorously oppose.—*Hsieh Cchi-shib, Manchukuo Foreign Minister.*

To us, living on the edge of the most disturbed continent, peace is not only desirable but essential. But our colleagues of the League of Nations should ask themselves if the existing peace machinery is quite perfect if it fails to provide a remedy for the encroachments and attacks we have suffered for many years as a result of warfare among Chinese militarists.—*Yosuke Matsuoka, Japanese delegate to the League of Nations.*