

LETTERS AND THE ARTS

TWO NEW HAMLETS

MOSCOW and Paris have been enjoying two productions of Hamlet as different from each other as they are from the conventional Anglo-Saxon representation. The Russian affair is incomparably the more original and important. Under the supervision of the director, Akimov, who has been studying Shakespeare's background for years and who is convinced that the teaching of Erasmus had a great influence on the English dramatist, Hamlet becomes a man of action dressed in silver armor and ambitious to overthrow the King. The 'To be or not to be' soliloquy is spoken in the company of Horatio and is interpreted to mean 'to be or not to be King.' Ophelia's madness becomes intoxication and the ghost of Hamlet's father is a trick played by the Prince himself to deceive the public. The play within the play is not supposed to give him assurance in his plan to murder the King—it is used to win over the audience and the court and convince them allegorically of the justice of Hamlet's case. As his nephew's antagonist, the King is raised to a character of prime importance, a charming and cowardly seducer who has completely ensnared the Queen.

Some of the wide gaps between the Shakespearean text and the Soviet interpretation Akimov tries to bridge by stage effects. The King and Queen are shown in bed with nightcaps on talking about Hamlet. Horatio listens in on some of the soliloquies. But there are still some yawning gaps—Hamlet running across the stage with a carrot in his hand—is such a character a strong leader?—and Horatio pronouncing him a philosopher who was not equipped for the battles of this life. Nevertheless the play has been a great success and for two reasons. One is the production, including the acting as well as

the stage setting; the other is the simplicity of the plot, which becomes understandable and absorbing as a story of frustrated ambition.

Hamlet in Paris has been playing to capacity houses for the same reason that it has gone well in Moscow—because of the absorbing quality of the play itself. Yet the French version is poles apart from the Russian. It is performed by the Comédie Française troupe in a translation made by Eugène Morand, the father of Paul Morand, for Sarah Bernhardt. This time, however, the leading part is not taken by a woman, although other actresses than Bernhardt have attempted the rôle in the past. The present Hamlet, Yonnel, keeps pausing, overemphasizing, and making irrelevant gestures. Because the members of the Comédie company did not expect the play to meet with much success, few good performers participated, but it has become so popular that they will not make the same mistake next time.

RUSSIA'S BERLIN SCHOOL

IN the Tempelhof quarter of Berlin a 'Soviet Work School' has been established for the children of Soviet Russian families living in the German capital. It is a long, low building in the modern style and was once a moving-picture studio but is now occupied by 160 children who stay there all day, traveling to and from their homes by automobile. Most of the instruction is given in Russian, but special emphasis is also laid on German, which, in Moscow, is given the same attention as French and English.

The methods in the Soviet Work School are identical with those used in Russia. The children are taught how to work as well as how to study. In miniature factories they are instructed in the use of lathes, drills, and various industrial

machines. They make screws, pottery, and all sorts of metal and wooden ware. Their ambition is to be engineers or pilots instead of coachmen or sailors, as in the old days. Their labors are supervised by trained factory workers. The purpose of the school is to train children to become workers without destroying their individuality. When they model clay their work is labeled and displayed, and those who go in for specialized tasks have the satisfaction of knowing that they can always find good jobs at home in factories. During the summer the school moves to the country, where the pupils attend outdoor classes and get an opportunity to exercise. And in winter they go to the mountains for skiing. A foreign student of Russia has said that Russians have always been more active in behalf of their children than in any other cause. Evidently this observation still holds good.

CONRAD AT THIRTY-ONE

NEW information about Joseph Conrad's seagoing days has been revealed in the French press. On September 30, 1888, Conrad arrived in Port Louis on the island of Mauritius, which lies a few hundred miles due east of Madagascar, as captain of the three-masted bark, *Otago*. He had come from Australia to fetch a cargo of sugar and departed on November 22. Thanks to the researches of a local man of letters, Savinien Mérédac, two documents telling about Conrad's stay on the island have been produced, one of them a description of Captain Korzeniowski—for he was still going under his real Polish name—and the other a personal questionnaire written in French, Conrad's replies having been set down in English. The first, a recent letter to M. Mérédac by the man from whom Conrad got the sugar, runs as follows:—

'He was of slightly more than average height, and his energetic and extremely mobile features would pass very rapidly from repose to a nervousness bordering

on anger. His great black eyes were melancholy, dreamy, and also gentle, except when he was irritated, which occurred fairly often. The most striking thing about the master of the *Otago*, outside of the distinction of his manners, was the contrast he formed with other ship captains. Unlike his colleagues, Korzeniowski always dressed like a dandy. He used to come to my office almost every day wearing a jacket of black or some other dark color, with a light-colored vest and fancy trousers, all well made and very elegant. He wore a black or gray hat slightly tilted to one side; he was always gloved and carried a gold-headed cane. His relations with other captains were limited to those of strict politeness, and he generally contented himself with a salute. He was therefore not very popular among his colleagues, who ironically dubbed him "the Russian count."

'As for his mental faculties, he had a perfect education and his conversation was very varied and interesting when he felt like being communicative, which was not always the case. He who was to acquire fame under the name of Joseph Conrad was often very taciturn and nervous. In those days he had a tic of his shoulders and eyes; and anything unexpected, such as a slamming door or something falling, made him jump.

'Joseph Conrad spoke both French and English very correctly, but he preferred the former language, which he handled with elegance. Our conversations were always held in French.'

The questionnaire was produced by a charming old French lady who has pleasant memories of the young Polish sea captain, whom she frequently entertained and who had answered a list of questions for her, signing his initials, J. C. K. It was customary in those days for young ladies to submit such questions to their gentleman friends, but it was Conrad's own idea to answer them in English, since that was the language he was studying especially hard at that time.

What is the principal trait of your character?

Laziness.

By what means do you try to please?

By making myself scarce.

What name makes your heart beat fast?

It is ready to beat fast for any name whatsoever.

What is your dream of happiness?

I do not dream about that; I seek reality.

Where does the person live who occupies your thoughts?

In a castle in Spain.

What quality do you like best in a woman?

Beauty.

What would you like to be?

I should like not to be.

What is your favorite flower?

The violet.

In what country would you like to live?

I do not know. Perhaps Lapland.

What color eyes do you prefer?

Gray.

With what gift of nature do you wish you were endowed?

Self-confidence.

What do you like best at a ball?

I do not dance.

What is your favorite promenade?

I detest all 'promenades.'

Which do you prefer, brunettes or blondes?

Both.

What is your favorite diversion?

Chasing wild geese.

State your mental attitude.

Calm.

Whom do you hate most?

Hypocrites.

Do you think that you are loved?

I cannot say.

THE REAL MATA HARI

NEW personal recollections of Mata Hari have lately appeared in the correspondence columns of the *North China Daily News*, the leading British newspaper in Shanghai. The author, who signs himself 'R. d'A. de R.,' met the lady a few

years before the War on a steamer traveling from Singapore to Marseille and he introduced her to M. Guimet, head of the Guimet Musée, to demonstrate her 'sacred dances' of the Javanese. Here is the way he describes her:—

'Mata Hari was tall, slender, and dark. Her complexion was like ivory and she was generally taken for an Eurasian; in fact, she always pretended that her mother was a Javanese priestess, although she admitted to me, later on, that she said so for the sake of her "business"—as a dancer. In fact, she was pure Dutch but spent all of her childhood in the West Indies; where her father was a petty official. She married a major of the Dutch army and was extremely unhappy; toward the age of thirty she divorced him and lived for some years in Holland in very poor circumstances, having barely enough to live on and to keep her child, a little girl who should now be a woman about thirty-five years of age—if she is still, poor creature, alive.

'Mrs. McLeod [Mata Hari's real name] managed to gather enough money to return to Java and she spent some time in that country; I understand that she studied there some of the local dances, and it was on her way back to Europe that I made her acquaintance.

'She was then a woman of thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age, but she did not look a day more than thirty. Her figure was splendid; she was not pretty or beautiful, but she had an extraordinary charm, the grace of a snake, and, finally, the cunning of the devil. Strange to say, until she became a professional dancer and met with a tremendous success as such in Paris, London, and Berlin, she was a quiet, unassuming woman, rather shy and bashful. But success went to her head and when she saw the great men—and great fools—of Europe at her feet, she seems to have then gone amuck. Her age was a dangerous age for women, and she proved how true that axiom is. She made money, lots of money, but threw it away as

easily as she earned it. She had an inexorable hatred for men.

'She confided to me, several times, that she was "on the warpath" against men and that for the sake of revenge she would ruin as many as she could. In those days I thought she was boasting, but she kept her word in the most terrible manner. She was also after money. Money became her god, her only god; her conversation on that subject filled me with disgust more than once, although I felt how much misery there was under her cloak of cynicism.

'I shall terminate this note by denying the foolish story about the so-called camouflage of her execution. It was alleged and finally believed for a long time that the execution was a simulacrum, more or less similar to the famous episode in *La Tosca*. It was also said that Mata Hari was assured that the guns would not be loaded with live cartridges and that all she would have to do would be to drop on the ground and pretend that she was dead; she was supposed to be rescued later on, and secretly deported.

'That story is nonsense. Mata Hari was never told anything of the kind, as my old friend, her lawyer and defender Maître Clunet, told me some time before he died, heartbroken. It must be said that, however abominable her deeds and well deserved her fate, she went to her doom as a brave woman, meeting death with her beautiful eyes wide open. She faced the firing squad with a smile, a bouquet of flowers in her arms, and before she fell her last words were: "*Ab! Ces Français!*"

'There is, of course, not a word of truth in the love affair as shown on the screen. Mata Hari was too "hard-boiled" to know what the word "love" may mean. At the time of her sinister activities, she was after money and nothing else; although her sympathies were unquestionably on the side of Germany. The idea of a stranger's being allowed to enter her cell at the Saint-Lazare prison, a few minutes before her execution, is absurd. As far as

Ramon Novarro is concerned, all those who have been through the War know that such a ridiculous-looking gigolo with a painted moustache could never impersonate one of those splendid but rugged-faced fighters of the aviation corps whom Mata Hari, after having fooled them with her paid kisses, sent callously to their death.'

One gathers that the author of these lines is a British citizen and not ashamed of the fact.

SPENGLER REVALUATED

REINHÖLD SCHNEIDER, a contributor to the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, takes advantage of the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* to estimate its importance. He feels that it appeared at an unfortunate moment because Germany was in such despair in 1917 that Spengler's prophecies were applied to the immediate situation instead of being seen against a perspective of a thousand years. But as time has passed *The Decline of the West* has been judged at its real value as 'an historical work of the first importance.' It does not rest, Herr Schneider insists, on deductive logic; its author came to his conclusions only after an extensive study of the facts and did not manipulate his material to suit his private preconceptions. The criticism most commonly made of Spengler is that he is too pessimistic; his contention that all civilizations, our own included, pass through different phases corresponding to the seasons of the year and then die has been widely resisted. But, according to Herr Schneider, Spengler is not really a pessimist at all—at least not in the sense that he refuses to accept life. It is one of the qualities of an aging society that it should have perspective and Spengler himself has argued that Western or 'Faustian' man with his immense curiosity is uniquely equipped to analyze and synthesize universal history. Indeed, the

conscious acceptance of a tragic destiny, with all its implications and possibilities, is the most complete affirmation of life that is possible.

As contributor to a newspaper that is supported by the big industrial interests, Herr Schneider naturally approves of Spengler's political beliefs, which are known to be reactionary, nationalistic, and even monarchistic. The National Socialists have appropriated some of Spengler's doctrines without warping them in the process as the Prussian militarists did before the War when they quoted Nietzsche.

Fifteen years are perhaps not enough in which to judge a man whose admirers claim that he is a master of the first order, but they do give the man himself time to show his true stature. Since 1922, when Volume II of *The Decline of the West* appeared, Spengler has scarcely been heard from. In 1924 he published a book on the reconstruction of the German Reich and wrote a reactionary manifesto to the youth of Germany. Complete silence followed until a year ago, when his eighty-page postscript to *The Decline of the West, Men and Technics*, appeared, an inadequate and inaccurate argument that man is a beast of prey. Surely a German writer worthy to be compared with the greatest that his country has produced—Goethe, Kant, Nietzsche, Marx—would not have kept silent during seven such crucial years.

NEW ENGLISH WORDS

HAVING compiled about five hundred pages of a six- or seven-hundred-page supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, Dr. C. T. Onions, who is in charge of the work, has told about some of the new words that have lately come into the language:—

'Just at the moment I am engaged on "shock," and I find it necessary to treat several compounds of words with reference to labor conditions in Russia, where there

are shock-brigades, shock-workers, and so on. There was a visit, you may remember, of shock-workers to England last year. The word is modeled in the first place on that of the shock-troops of Germany—those special forces of men who in the Great War were chosen for storming and other operations. The Russians have since adopted the idea, and have applied it to industry and agriculture and their brigades of workers. It is an instance of a very recent piece of terminology of which we are bound to take notice.'

A number of foreign words have been added—'Kultur' from the German, 'kulak' from the Russian, and 'jazz,' 'graft,' and 'dope' from the American. Reference is made to 'step on the gas' and the expression 'no flies on' so-and-so is traced back to 1848, when Haygarth's *Bush Life in Australia* mentioned that 'there are no flies about that black bull.' The term 'floodlight' first appeared in 1917, but 'hike,' supposedly a recent importation from America, crops up in a letter by Susan Hale written in 1868, when she spoke of having had 'a fearful heik up the Grand Pyramid.' Conan Doyle also used the word in connection with Sherlock Holmes's 'hiking around the world.' The presumption is that it is a bit of local dialect from some unknown quarter of the British Isles. Dr. Onions also announced the publication next spring of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, which will contain the essential part of the complete work, giving the formation of words, their etymology, their meanings in historical order, and some quotations. It will contain 2,600 pages and sell for three guineas.

A CHAMPAGNE ANNIVERSARY

THE two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of champagne was celebrated at the end of June when the Archbishop of Rheims crowned with a wreath of vine leaves the statue of Dom Pérignon, a native of that city who, as a Benedictine monk in the Hautevillers

Abbey, is credited with having perfected the preparation of sparkling white wine. The claim that he invented champagne must, however, be dismissed, for even the Romans knew that a second fermentation in the bottle produced carbonic acid gas. They used to put some kind of bung into their wine jars to preserve the famous fizz, and corks of oak bark had certainly been used long before Dom Pérignon's day.

Nevertheless Dom Pérignon must be recognized as a real innovator as well as a man who did more to improve wine than any other individual in recorded history. He was famous for his delicate taste and it was written of him during his lifetime that 'this unique man retained to a great old age such a singular delicacy of taste that he could give without hesitation the name of the canton that had produced each grape. Presented with a basket containing grapes from all the vines of the region, as well as some from Cumières, he tasted them and then arranged them according to the soil from which they had come, at the same time indicating which strains should be blended to form the best quality of wine.'

His own notes and records were destroyed during the French Revolution, but the tradition is that as cellarer and wine keeper in the Abbey he experimented with adding sugar to wine and finally achieved remarkable success. Born at Sainte-Menehould in 1638 of good bourgeois stock, Pierre Pérignon entered the Abbey of Saint-Vannes in Verdun at the age of twenty. Ten years later he moved to

the Benedictine Abbey at Hautevillers, where he discovered his true avocation. He lived to the age of seventy-seven and was described by his superior when he died as 'honest, virtuous, learned, and of a very sweet disposition.'

Since his death tastes in champagne have changed. Until 1865 sweet champagne was more highly esteemed than dry and in the mid nineteenth century 'a man who likes dry champagne' was the equivalent of a gum-chewer to-day. Professor Saintsbury, an authority on fine living as well as fine literature, recalls that the head of a great champagne firm once said that as long as he lived there should be no dry champagne sent out under his name. But the old sweet champagne seems to have been different from the modern brand. It has been described as 'moderately rich and full flavored,' 'delicately dry with the true pineapple flavor and bouquet,' and 'sufficiently powerful'—this last no great alteration. No less than seventy British visitors flew from Croydon in six airplanes to attend the celebrations at Rheims, and many distinguished foreign diplomats put in an appearance. The following passage from Thackeray was unearthed as a fitting tribute from across the Channel:—

'Yes, Beloved Sparkler, you are an artificial, barley-sugared, brandied beverage. But console yourself—you are the liquor in whose bubbles lies the greatest amount of the sparkle of good spirits—you have made me hope, aye, and forget. Ought a man to disown such a friend?'

AS OTHERS SEE US

HOOVER AND ROOSEVELT

MOST foreign commentators on the American presidential campaign assert that its outcome will be determined by domestic factors and that there is no difference between Republicans and Democrats on matters of world policy anyhow. The British press, however, includes several thoughtful observations. The *Manchester Guardian*, which advocates free trade in season and out, is almost alone in foreseeing a lively struggle over the tariff issue between two able and representative men:—

The Democrats have picked their best man. Governor Roosevelt is as strong a candidate as they could have found, and he has it in him, if elected, to make a good president. He has integrity and brains and tact; he has wide experience of politics and of public administration. He is neither ignorant nor intolerant of other nations. He is definitely a liberal rather than a radical; but he is also definitely a liberal rather than a conservative. He and the President will be antagonists worthily matched. For whatever Mr. Hoover's shortcomings may be—and they have been shown perhaps on the domestic rather than on the international side of his policies—no serious observer denies that he stands far above the ruck of Republican politicians, and distinctly above the average of Republican presidents. It will be an extraordinarily interesting fight. The two candidates are not only men of ability and personality. They stand for something. They have each an individual outlook, a general purpose in politics. If Mr. Hoover is a conservative, he is a sincere and humane one, not a shallow or venal reactionary. And, if Mr. Roosevelt

is more properly to be called a Democrat than many who have held the name before him, he is in no degree a demagogue. For once one can look forward to a presidential election that will be something more than a scramble for power and the privileges that power brings with it.

The real division between the parties is on economic grounds, and the crux of it is the tariff question. The Republicans place absolute faith in protection. They propose to maintain the existing tariff wall at its present height, and even to add a few bricks in some places and to fill in a few gaps in others. They do not admit the responsibility of the American tariff for any part of the economic troubles from which the world is suffering, and, whatever coöperation they are prepared to offer in the political or the monetary field, they will not budge on tariffs.

There is no doubt that Governor Roosevelt is in full sympathy with the movement for lower tariffs. A year ago he declared that 'the Hawley-Smoot tariff is one of the most important factors in the present world-wide depression, and . . . one of the most serious obstacles to the return of prosperity.' On Saturday [July 2] he described it aptly as a 'barbed-wire entanglement,' and spoke explicitly of inviting other nations to 'plan with us for the restoration of the trade of the world.' There is no issue on which his attitude is more definite, or more exactly opposed to that of the Republicans. And not only, one fears, of the Republicans. It is distinctly probable that the bitter but not explicit hostility shown toward the Governor by one section of his own party is due in large part to his fiscal views. It is not unnatural that such opposition should have centred in the person of Mr. Alfred E. Smith, who is more closely linked than any other available candidate with the manufacturing interests of the east coast,