

# A Letter from France

By MAURICE BOURGEOIS

TO give more unity to these occasional "letters from France," I generally group and review together books on the same subject. I intend to examine today miscellaneous French publications on the cinema, which, I understand, is a subject of special interest to Americans.

Between 1895 and 1925, the French bibliography of the cinema consisted only of some twelve or fifteen volumes, the most notable being: H. Diamont-Berger's "Le Cinéma," Arnaud's and Boisyvon's "Le Cinéma pour Tous," and André Lang's "Entretiens Cinématographiques," intended for the general public; critical essays by J. Epstein and P. A. Birot, both of them entitled "Cinéma"; Robert Florey's "Film-land" and "Deux Ans dans les Studios Américains" (first published in *Cinémagazine*); and the charming works of the late Louis Delluc: "Cinéma et Cie," "Photogénie," "Charlot," and "Drames de Cinéma." Had he lived, Delluc would have devoted his talent to the moving pictures; and he is also remembered as the author of two remarkable films: "Fièvre" and "La Femme de Nulle Part," in which his wife, Eve Francis (the admirable interpreter of Paul Claudel's plays) played the title-rôle. In 1919, Jules Romains had published his celebrated "Donogoo Tonka," a short story written in the manner of a film scenario, with titles printed in capitals and appearing within little frames, as on the screen.

Since last year, books and pamphlets on the "movies" have become unusually plentiful. I can only mention in passing technical monographs, such as Georges Billecoq's "Régime Fiscal de l'Industrie Cinématographique en France," Marcel Mayer's "Tirage et Développement des Films Cinématographiques," and André Merle's "Les Appareils de Prise de Vues Cinématographiques." G. Michel Coissac, director of "Cinéopse," has produced an admirably complete and readable "Histoire du Cinématographe de ses Origines à Nos Jours," which will not be superseded for many years. Of greater literary interest are volumes discussing the "aesthetics" of the moving pictures, e.g. "L'Idée et l'Écran," by Henri Fescourt (producer of "Les Misérables") and Jean-Louis Bouquet, and "Naissance du Cinéma," by Léon Moussinac (well-known as the author of another book on theatrical scenery). "Birth of the Cinéma" is a very striking title, if one recalls that the ciné- ma has just celebrated its thirtieth anniversary and that a tablet has been placed on the site of the Café Riche to commemorate the first projection of the brothers Lumière. Moussinac's book is important, being the first attempt to summarize what may be termed the philosophy of the movies. It contains a very suggestive chapter on the

contribution of the various countries to the development of the "seventh art," which the author characterizes as the first of the "cinematic" arts (*i.e.*, arts of motion), as opposed to the "static" (or plastic) arts. Moussinac is of the opinion that the former will gradually displace the latter, and he most ingeniously links up modern man's enjoyment of motion (and of the moving pictures) with the progress of mechanics in the twentieth century.

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In an article contributed to *Le Crapouillot*, Moussinac alluded to the contempt of professional men of letters for the ciné- ma, in which, he contended, most of them see an inferior mode of expression, subservient to mechanical, industrial, and commercial necessities. This attitude of disdain is now a thing of the past. Indeed, it has become almost a fashion among the younger writers of France to take a sympathetic interest in the ciné- ma, and to discuss at length its relations with literature. *Le Disque Vert*, a Belgium periodical, devotes an entire special number to Charlie Chaplin, whose genius wins dithyrambic praise from the pen of thirty leading French and Belgian authors. An important symposium on "Letters, Modern Thought, and the Cinéma" appears in the pages of *Les Cahiers du Mois*, edited by François and André Berge, another issue of which contains a collection of "Scenarios" written for the screen by the editors and by Maurice Betz, Jacques Bonjean, Robert Desnos, André Desson, and André Harlaire. Albert Pigasse directs the Collection "Cinario" (a fanciful neologism made up of "cinéma" and "scenario"), to which will contribute such well-known writers as Georges Duhamel, Pierre MacOrlan, Joseph Kessel, Alexandre Arnoux, Roger Allard, René Bizet, Eugène Marsan, Louis-Martin Chauffier.

Many of the more "advanced" *littérateurs* of France recognize the importance of the ciné- ma in modern life and its technical and artistic possibilities. Writing on "Le Fantastique et le Cinéma" in a new publication calling itself "Jabiru" (the name of an Icelandic bird), Pierre MacOrlan goes the length of proclaiming that the ciné- ma can replace literature, and that a film producer has a better chance to express himself than a writer. Interviewed by "Comœdia," Alfred Machard, the author of "Bout-de-Bibi" and "Coquecigrole," speaks of the "wonderful resources" of the moving pictures, and maintains that a good novelist "thinks in images"—in other words, inwardly visualizes his characters and situations in a manner which may be described as "cinématographic." Among other

enthusiasts of the screen may be mentioned Elie Faure, the essayist, Léon-Pierre Quint, the distinguished biographer of Marcel Proust, and Jean Prévost, who now reports critically on the ciné- ma for *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*.

The influence of the moving pictures on much of the recent literary output of France would require a long and minute study. That influence makes itself felt in the prose of Giraudoux, Paul Morand, and Joseph Delteil, the rhythm and imagery of which have a cinématographic quality. It is conspicuous in the novels of Blaise Cendrars, "L'Or" and "Moravagine," bizarre films taking place in many countries, at a prodigious pace. "Un Suicide," by André Beucler, is also distinctly cinématographic in conception. In Jean-Victor Pellérin's amusing comedies, "Intimité" and "Têtes de Réchange," the secret thoughts of the personages are made visible by a cinématographic process; and Robert de Flers' and Francis de Croisset's latest play, "Le Docteur Miracle," is based on a dream, as are many films seen on the screen.

The moving picture world has supplied the theme of some recent novels, to which American readers will turn with interest: "Hollywood," by Valentin Mandelstamm, the author of "Cher New York"; Abel Hermant's "La Marionnette," which tells the story of another Jackie Coogan; René Clair's "Adams" (dedicated to Charlie Chaplin), the fantastic biography of Cecil Adams, a ciné- ma actor who identifies himself with seven American screen stars, finally thinking himself God and becoming insane. "Adams" is the first book of René Clair, whose work as film producer is well-known. The technique of the ciné- ma pervades his novel and gives him a new clue to the Pirandellian problem of personality. It is characteristic in this connection that Pirandello's novel on the ciné- ma, "On Tourne," has lately been published in Paris.

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Lastly, many efforts are being made to intensify the exchanges between *littérateurs* and *cinéastes*. In *Cinémagazine*, Lucien Wahl reviews "books as inspirers of films." Anatole France's "Crainquebille," Pierre Benoit's "L'Atlantide" have been very skilfully adapted for the screen. M. Lucien Wahl's initiative will be instrumental in ruining the legend according to which fiction and the theater have nothing to do with the "seventh art"—an error which has considerably retarded the progress of the French ciné- ma. Along similar lines, the publishing firm of Grasset has lately founded a "Bureau d'Etudes Cinématographiques," to study the possibilities of novels and plays for the screen; M. Chanceler, the curator of the Maison de Balzac, is in charge of this interesting organization. As regards the contribution of the ciné- ma to literature, we have had, during the last few months, several novels written from films: particularly enjoyable are Fortuné Paillot's "novelized" versions of Harold Lloyd's films, "Monte la-dessus" and "Et Puis Ça Va" (or "Le Docteur Jack"), and René Jeanne's excellent novels, "La Terre Promise" and "Destinée," based on the films of Henry Roussel.

ent Danish philosopher finds to be t outstanding merit of the work. There no question that J. Anker Larsen's aim h been to lead the reader right up to the "op door" where he may glimpse something of kingdom not of this world. He does not however, furnish any formula as to how o may enter the sacred precincts.

"Anker Larsen tells us," says Profess Höfding, "how at a certain period in f life, after having tried both theology ar theosophy, he felt the need of relieving th which made his childhood so bright, peaceful, and complete. More and mo this longing for the past filled his mind.

"The first step on the way home," Ank Larsen says himself in his book, was tak on a certain day during a walk throug wood. The forest atmosphere filled hi with health and strength. And while t this paradisaical state of mind the pictur a beautiful path in a wood rose before h soul.

But it was not at that time, but later, th Anker Larsen became conscious of the fa that this path of his vision belonged to tl environment of his childhood. He had b come so tired of looking at all that su rounded him that he closed his eyes and was only when he once more looked b fore him that he saw "a little path, fresh, so pure and fairy-like that it mu have been one of the walks in the gard of paradise."

The author emphasizes that what he sa was not recollections that might be call forth as one wished. The glimpses an of themselves, he declares, and the condit bore the stamp of a presence, was not ima inative. Professor Höfding seems to be c the opinion that Anker Larsen himself stan inside the open door and that what he giv forth from there carries the impress o genuineness and experience. The review involuntarily recalls Professor Höfding work, "Experience and Interpretation" which we are made acquainted with tl two feminine mystics, the Spanish nu Teresa, of the sixteenth century and tl remarkable Protestant mystic of the twent eth century who is called Cecile V by h psychological father-confessor.

More or less autobiographical in fo and intent, "Before the Open Door" b longs in a different category from t author's two previous books whose fiction structure is easily determined. But J. Ank Larsen has nevertheless strengthened himse here as a writer of force and deep insigh When in due time the American publish of "The Philosopher's Stone" and "Mart and Maria" places "Before the Open Door" alongside the former in its English transl tion he may be assured in advance o respectful reception in case the translat does his full duty with a work that tl Danish reviewers, at any rate, have hail as a distinct contribution to a literature th more and more, it appears, is turning the unseen world for its subject matter. A endorsement like that of Professor Höf ding is certainly not to be taken lightly.

## Foreign Notes

MADAME DELARUE-MARDUS is n a believer. She has written her "Saint Thérèse de Lisieux" (Fasquale) from me human interest in the young Carmelite n who lived and died close to her own nati town. The volume consists of two parts, o in which the writer indulges in ruthless sati of the commercialism and the impossib artistic taste disgracing the cult of the e quisite young nun, and another in which s analyses her "Diary" and leads us to sha her admiration for the sober heroism of nun nearer asceticism than mysticism. M dame Delarue-Mardus is a poet, and h verse is as impassioned as that of Madar de Noailles. The capacity for admiring an accepting greatness, visible in every pag e this perfectly simple analysis, is what giv the book its value. No preaching can a proach this sincerity of admiration.

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What is a vivid and yet authoritati chronicle of naval episodes in the wor war has recently made its appearance France from the pen of Paul Chack (Par Editions de France). In his "Combats Batailles sur Mer" M. Chack has pictur in dramatic manner incidents not only t the participation of his own country but well of other nations. His book makes i teresting reading.

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In his "Coleridge" G. Ferrando (Flo ence: Le Monnier) has set forth with mu balance and skill an analysis of the po adapted to interpret him to the Itali reader. His discussion is directed to demo strating that Coleridge is primarily a poet.

## FAIRY GOLD

This is the novel whose sheer enchantment will carry the name of Compton Mackenzie beyond the heights of "Carnival" and "Sinister Street."

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## The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later

### Drama

ALEXANDER AND THREE SMALL PLAYS. By LORD DUNSANY. Putnams, 1926. \$2.

The three act play which forms the principal piece in Lord Dunsany's new dramatic collection does not depart, save in length, from his familiar vein. Like many of the one act plays in which he took storm the amateur actors of this country, it makes great, if somewhat vague, demands upon the producer in the matters of setting and costume. In language it presents the same strange blend of biblical simplicity and power with a decadent rhetorical imagery after the manner of the Wilde of "Salome" and "A Florentine Tragedy." "Alexander" is dramatically uneven, attaining unquestionable emotional persuasiveness in such scenes as that between the hero and the Amazonian queen Rhododactilos, after he has murdered his friend Clitus. But there are moments of positive dulness, and an excess of the stage trickery in which the author has always excelled. In general, as in his "If," Lord Dunsany seems principally to demonstrate that his talent is far more effective in the one act form than spread out with the purpose of furnishing an evening's entertainment. This is due, no doubt, to the slightly pompous turns of dialogue, and the continual making of stage pictures, which are thoroughly entertaining in themselves, and completely nullify themselves upon repetition.

On the whole, it seems more likely that the three small plays in the volume will achieve a greater popularity. "The Amusements of Khan Kharuda," a striking little experiment with masks, and "The Old King's Tale" are certainly not inferior to such similar things as "A Night at an Inn" and "The Laughter of the Gods," which have attained production innumerable times under all sorts of handicaps, and have succeeded invariably with their audiences. Affording as they do an equal opportunity to the actor and the scene painter, there is an unimitated, if not inimitable, neatness about these thrillers which is lacking in the longer and more grandiose effort.

FULGENS AND LUCRES. By Henry Wedgwood. Edited by F. S. Boas and A. W. Reed. Oxford University Press. \$2.50.

POMP. By Sada Cowan. Brentano's. \$2.

RED OLEANDERS. By Rabindranath Tagore. Macmillan. \$2.

ABOUT SHAKESPEARE AND HIS PLAYS. By G. F. Brady. Oxford University Press. \$1.20.

EVERY ONE HAS HIS FAULT. By Mrs. Inchbald. Oxford University Press. 35 cents.

PETER SHOWS HIS PICTURES. By Tipton Lindsay Frasier. Published by the author.

### Fiction

SUN WOMAN. By JAMES WILLARD SCHULTZ. Houghton Mifflin. 1926. \$2.

Mr. Schultz, who married an Indian woman of the Blackfeet tribe as long ago as 1879, has written some twenty books about the Indians of those earlier days, most of them for boys and girls. "Sun Woman," too, though described as the author's first novel and therefore presumably intended for adults, really belongs on the list of fiction for young people—of all ages.

The slight story has to do with an Indian girl who longs to remain unwedded but learns in a vision that she is destined to marry a lover recognizable only by the token he shall bear in his hand. A few good fights and several scenes involving exclamations like "Laugh, damn you, laugh! I'll have her yet!" manage to delay the simple *dénouement*. If the author had drawn more widely—and deeply—upon his knowledge of Indian ways and his memories of life among the early fur traders, or if he had been able to develop the poetic possibilities of his romantic background, or if he had even given us a rattling good yarn, the book might have been saved from banality. As it is, however, it falls pretty flat: both language and sentiment stalk on stilts and the characters have only as much individuality as the words Indian, white man, hero, heroine, and villain can give them.

TREASURE OF THE LAKE. By H. RIDER HAGGARD. Doubleday, Page, 1926. \$2.

One grieves while one welcomes this posthumous novel. It is a new story in the long list of Allan Quatermain tales, and while in essentials it does not differ greatly from the many other stories of African adventure that Rider Haggard wrote, they are so well done of their kind that one cannot fairly quarrel with the uniformity of construction. Admirers of Rider Hag-

gard need no more introduction than this to what one fears must prove to be the last publication from his pen.

HIS MAJESTY THE KING. By COSMO HAMILTON. Doubleday Page, 1926. \$2.

By means of a liberal exercise of the historical imagination Mr. Cosmo Hamilton has written a very charming and appealing little story with Charles II as the central character. He is emphatically not the hero, since there is little of the heroic about the figure of the merry monarch as Mr. Hamilton paints him in the days of his exile in Bruges when, sick with hope deferred, he and a little band of faithful friends were waiting for the Restoration. Mr. Hamilton adopts, or invents for himself, a legend that, just as the long-awaited news arrived, the irresponsible monarch disappeared for a period of twenty-four hours, leaving his followers in anguished fear lest at this eleventh hour, when hopes at last were bright, the idiosyncrasies of the king himself might lead after all to disaster. The events of these twenty-four hours Mr. Hamilton professes to relate, and in doing so he spins a very pleasant yarn. It is, of course, quite obvious that if Charles II chooses to disappear the reason for his disappearance must be a lady. This particular romantic episode, however, is a good

deal less sordid than most that are attributed to the merry monarch. It is in fact, as Mr. Hamilton tells it, a very pretty and delicate little love story with renunciation as the keynote, and one likes to think that in refusing to take what he might the king, whose debaucheries were as flagrant as his personal charms were appealing, gained strength, for once at any rate, to be "more of a king in his own house."

LOVE US ALL. By A. NEIL LYONS. A. & C. Boni, 1926.

Mr. Lyons has been praised so abundantly by the reviewers as a master of the short story that there is no point in swelling the chorus. All that has been said in his praise is perfectly true, including the eulogy of Mr. S. P. B. Mais, printed on the jacket of the present volume, that he knows no other author "who can write a completely satisfying short story in two pages which is as tart and swift in its attack on the strong as it is charitable and tolerant in its sympathy with the weak."

Mr. Lyons has certainly reduced compression to a fine art. The stories in this volume average only seven pages and some of them occupy not more than three or four. One may be reasonably assured that the volume will serve as a text book in schools of short-story writing. It is right that it should, for no one is writing at the present time who combines more happily the suave cynicism that is characteristic of the best English humor with the technical excellence of short-story construction which has been

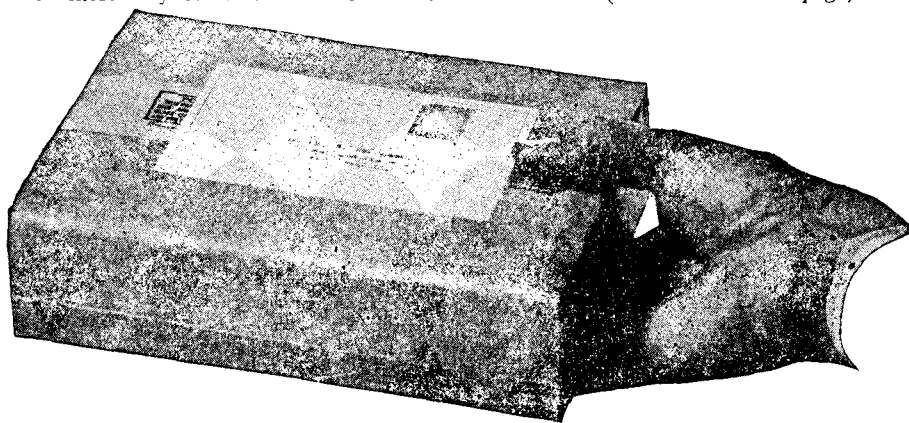
highly developed in America. Acknowledging all this, one is yet tempted to a reservation. Miniature work is a recognized and legitimate branch of the art of painting, but when one speaks of the art one has in mind, not the delicate detail of the miniature, but the full sweep of the larger canvas.

THE WORM OUROBOROS. By E. R. EDDISON. A. & C. Boni, 1926. \$3.

Through these pages fine lords swank from one heroic occurrence to another, desirable princesses intrigue for or inspire their lovers, and a dark king makes magic. In all a bravely fashioned tale displays itself and demands credence in this work. The prose in which it is told has a sonorous, rich beauty that caresses the ear. We almost completely succumbed to its spell. That seems large praise but the word, almost, as we just have used it, has a notable importance. For example, a predilection for too precious verbosity burdens many paragraphs; a cadenced prose becoming too smooth and sweet blurs certain poetically conceived designs. Notwithstanding the "Worm Ouroboros" deserves the critical connotation now generally given to the word, authentic. Finally it must be stated that it is not so much a grand epic account of an imaginative world as the utopia of a decadent who wills to escape our present century. A longer review of the book, written from the English Edition was published in the issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature* of April 18, 1925.

(Continued on next page)

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