

BOOKS ABROAD

ÆSTHETE AND ANARCHIST

L'ÉQUINOXE DE SEPTEMBRE. By *Henri de Montherlant*. Paris: Grasset. 1938.

LETTRE AUX PAYSANS SUR LA PAUVRETÉ ET LA PAIX. By *Jean Giono*. Paris: Grasset. 1938.

(Léon Pierre-Quint in *Lumière*, Paris)

IT IS perhaps a significant coincidence that two books about the imminent war, by writers whose natures are so profoundly dissimilar, should appear at the same time. Jean Giono and Henri Montherlant seem to take entirely opposed positions in regard to recent events. What separates them is more than their political faith; it is the conception of life itself. For Montherlant, life can only be precious, intense and beautiful—or at the very least, bearable—during those rare moments when the individual is under the illusion that he is escaping a humdrum existence either through a courageous action in which he risks his life, or through the extremity of passion, or perhaps by means of drugs.

For Giono, 'it is easy to live.' His concept of life is an optimistic one. 'There are no heroes,' he says. 'The dead are immediately forgotten.' He admits that heroism is a synonym for the desire for glory and immortality, that the hero tastes a moment of profound joy in the midst of the heroic act. But he prefers another form of life. He prefers a man 'who is content to live out his days at leisure,' one who finds his happiness in every-day existence, in natural and pleasant work close to the soil, in the balanced happiness of family life.

On the political plane the two books are even more removed from each other, although they sometimes startle the reader with unexpected analogies. Montherlant heatedly reproaches the French masses for their absence of reaction, their

bleating pacifism. Giono reproaches them eloquently for their incredible resignation before the imminent butchery of war. The two books are less records than they are cries of revolt against the passive, sluggish masses. Each of them tells his bitter truth to his own particular public: Montherlant, the aristocrat, harangues the bourgeoisie, Giono, the peasant writer, speaks to the peasants.

Both men reflect more or less accurately the present-day confusion. In that sense their books go beyond the framework of their immediate subject. The civilization of today is strange to them; they consider it from above, with detached aloofness. They hunger after solitude. Giono wants to cultivate his garden and Montherlant his ego. Both condemn the modern times. Montherlant longs after the fabulous days of mythological antiquity, and Giono tries to revive the estate of the noble savage, already idealized by Rousseau. In their work both emerge as fierce individualists, anarchists, revolting against a society that is beginning to take on the aspect of an anthill. Montherlant confines himself to remaining a moralist, observing with a keen eye across space and time the relativity of human attitudes. Giono cherishes the dream of being a social reformer, creating again a pastoral anarchistic State.

L'Équinoxe de Septembre is one of the most remarkable essays ever written by Montherlant. It is really a collection of fragments, welded into unity by notes, introductions and significant subtitles. Though attached to his country, he chides it, jeering at its 'milliner's morale.' Peace is not achieved by prayers. It is possible only as a result of respect for power. To believe in nothing but peace, to base everything upon it, to cry peace, peace—to him it is nothing but a glorified and futile Coué method. Montherlant speaks

of the terrible subject of war without hesitation or apprehension, with a sort of disdainful detachment. He is not worried about its coming. There will always be wars, and he accepts that fact.

For him it won't mean the end of the world but, at the most, the end of a civilization. In that case, another civilization will take its place. And Montherlant has no particular liking for the present-day one, which seems to him mechanical, mediocre, bourgeois and oriented toward a flat and desolate collectivism. This explains his indifference to the values around him. He does not believe in the idea of progress, but in every individual fashioning his life as if it were a masterpiece. His æstheticism, however, is relieved by a remarkable sense of reality. He is difficult to contradict, because he is never dogmatic. Perhaps he could be opposed on the emotional plane, but although he despises our times, he loves life, and for this, those who are irritated by his frankness will forgive him much.

**THE EXTRAORDINARY PROFESSION
HISTORY OF THE FILM.** By Maurice
Bardèche and Robert Brasillach. Trans-
lated and edited by Iris Barry. London:
Allen and Unwin. 1938.

(Graham Greene in the *Spectator*, London)

DID you know that talkies were exhibited at the Paris Exposition of 1900; that American movie producers opened their studios in California only so as to escape process-servers and be able to disappear over the Mexican border at a moment's notice; that Charlie Chaplin began by wearing a forked beard and Harold Lloyd was first known as Lonesome Luke; that *The Italian Straw Hat* was Clair's sixth film; that in the uncensored version of *Shoulder Arms* the Allies gave Charlie Chaplin a banquet after his capture of the Kaiser 'and the King of England creeps up and sneaks a button off his uniform as a souvenir'; did you know. . . ? One could go on a long while

recounting the information, astonishing and bizarre, contained in this history book.

But their account of what the authors rightly call an 'extraordinary profession' has higher merits; it is well and wittily written; rare quality in books on the film; the authors don't take their subject too seriously, and no one before them has evoked so delicately and delightfully the world of the early film before the industry had developed along monstrous lines. We read of *Bathing Beach* in 1895 (a critic wrote of 'the marvelous realism of an unmistakably genuine ocean'), and of little pictures of M. Lumière's home life. 'Beside a pool in the garden, Mme. Lumière, in a tussore dress with a polka-dot bodice and a sailor hat tilted over her forehead, fishes for goldfish with a roguish air. Under an arbor at the end of the garden, Auguste Lumière and his friend Mr. Trewey play piquet and drink their beer.' Who could have foreseen from these honest beginnings the epics of Mr. de Mille and the publicized malapropisms of Mr. Goldwyn?

As a history of the film, the book contains many errors—the editor corrects some of them in footnotes. A distortion is due to the date (1935) when it was written, before the resurrection of the French film, but most mistakes can be put down to lack of English (a handicap when writing of talkies) and to the quota limits of the authors' knowledge. The English cinema is completely ignored; the name of the pioneer, Friese-Greene, seems unknown to patriots who dwell lovingly on Lumière, and the work of Grierson, Balcon, Victor Savile, Hitchcock receives no notice. Granted that we rank a long way after America, France, Germany and Russia, could not room have been found for us with Norway, Holland and Denmark?

As criticism, we may sometimes quarrel with the authors' predilection for the artistic and the literary, which makes them value Lang's *Nibelungen* over his *M*

(though I hardly think it is the duty of their editor to 'put them right' in dogmatic footnotes); but as a record of the French cinema—and of the silent film generally—the book is admirable. Their quick surrealist-trained eye picks out the vivid detail, their comparisons—like that of Abel Gance with Victor Hugo—are illuminating, and they write with candor and *panache*: take their verdict on de Mille's huge cliché-crowded talent—'He shares with the Italian film-producers the responsibility of having been the spiritual ally of the financiers.'

In some ways it is a sad book—a record of wasted opportunities, of debauched talents, of fine hopes dwindling down to a million dollars, and many readers will feel sympathy for the authors' lament at the end of the classic silent age:—

Even today it is questionable whether it is possible to love the film sincerely unless one knew it in the silent days, in those last years which are inseparable from the days of one's youth. The Germans, the Russians, the French, the Americans and the Swedes had etched unforgettable shadows on the screen. . . . The faces of men and women had learned to be expressive in those mute dramas by the aid of no more than an eyelid, the flicker of a glance. . . . We demanded emotions and dreams, passion and suffering, and felt no need for words. . . . Those actors, so well adapted to express subtleties, those plots which were of necessity so clear and so brief, may all be forgotten in the future. But we who witnessed the birth of an art may possibly also have seen it die.

NEWS TO AUSTRALIA

PRESS, RADIO AND WORLD AFFAIRS. By W. Macmahon Ball. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press. 1938.

(From the *Japan Weekly Chronicle*, Kobe)

THE outstanding fact that emerges from this interesting survey of the Australian press and radio in its relation to world affairs is the deep-rooted feeling of dependence on the United Kingdom apparent in the Dominion at sight of any

international crisis. It is a reaction that has come to be the despair of many intelligent Australians who, while no means anxious to sever the bonds of Empire, believe—with much reason to support them—that it is time Australia had a foreign policy of her own. It is at least very obviously true that in Pacific affairs, and particularly as regards relations with Japan, it is not possible for Australian interests to be identified absolutely with those of the United Kingdom.

Naturally there is a rough coincidence of principles, and probably there will always be in Australia a readiness to support the main lines of British policy if only because the opinions and susceptibilities of Dominion Governments are given more and more weight in Downing Street. But within these main boundaries there is room for considerable divergence, and it is right that Australia should exercise the freedom of choice that is often open to the Commonwealth Government.

The trouble is that the Australian public, though served by a free press, is kept singularly ill-informed. Almost the whole of Australia's news comes from British sources, and consequently retains a British bias. A closer interest in international affairs on the part of the average Australian would no doubt speedily produce a corrective influence; in the meantime there is no apparent intention on the part of any paper to plunge into the costly business of an independent news service and the stationing abroad of special correspondents who would interpret world events from an Australian angle.

It is a curious fact that most of Australia's news from the Far East reaches press desks only after an exhausting journey to London. The principal cable news service is that of the Australian Press Association, which in a twelve-month period ending June, 1937, cabled an average of between 27,000 and 28,000 words a week. About 20,000 words came from the London office, culled from the main British and European services.

Another 3,200 words a week came from the British Official Wireless; and 3,300 from New York, leaving the magnificent total of 900 words a week from the rest of the world. There are reasons for this, of course. London is a logical clearing house; and it costs only a fifth as much to send a telegram from London to Australia as it does from Japan. The misfortune is that it is always the London angle that secures prominence. Mr. Ball, in his opening chapter, goes very fully into this factor and clearly makes the point that Australians are entitled to something better.

Whether they will get it is another matter. The London angle on test cricket has long been unacceptable—hence the ship loads of special correspondents regurgitated at Lord's—but unfortunately matters of international moment do not have quite the same fascination for Sydney and Melbourne as do the exploits of Bradman and O'Reilly.

And then there is the Dominion Government, always prepared to be horrified at any intelligent display of interest. Mr. Ball quotes an altogether remarkable appeal by the Minister for Defense (Mr. Thorby) at the time of Mr. Eden's resignation Mr. Thorby asked:—

'all loyal Australians to refrain from entering into controversy through the press, over the air, or from public platforms, on the present delicate international situation. . . .'

The two questions that occur to Australians today in regard to Japan, Mr. Ball writes, are the threat Japanese manufactures supposedly contain to the Australian standard of living, and the fear that Japan may become involved in war with Australia or the British Empire. It is upon these two questions that Australian newspapers have 'sought to form public opinion in a rather definite manner.'

The fact is, of course, that political and Imperial considerations weigh more than the economic. That has been demonstrated time and time again. Mr. Ball sums it up when he notes the widespread conviction

that Australia controls her own fiscal policy only as long as she retains her political security, and that this security depends upon the protective military strength of Britain. If Australia wants Britain to protect her she must be loyal, 'and in practice loyalty to Britain means giving support to British foreign policy. To criticize British foreign policy is to divide the Empire . . . and to weaken the Empire is to undermine Australia's own security.'

It is a loyalty that must be undergoing its severest test today. Certainly, if it stands Mr. Chamberlain, it will stand anything.

JEWISH PICARESQUE

MANGECLIOUS. By *Albert Cohen*. Paris: *Nouvelle Revue Française*. 1938.

(Marcel Pagnol in *Nouvelles Littéraires*, Paris)

ALBERT COHEN has done his race a great service in writing his two masterpieces, *Solal* and *Mangelclous*. The first one, published a few years ago, commanded the attention of the whole world, and its author was hailed as one of the masters of the contemporary novel. Even as late as March, 1933, a few months after the advent of Hitler, the *Vossische Zeitung* characterized this novel as a 'work of genius and the fruit of the most creative and profound inspiration'—a significant tribute from a land where anti-Semitism is rife.

Mangelclous, a sequel to *Solal*, does not quite fit into the category of a novel. Rather, it is a comical burlesque of an epic, dealing with five Jews from Cephalonia who one morning leave their enchanted isle in sunny Greece to go frolicking off to Geneva. They have many marvelous adventures, which the author describes with remarkable animation and charm. These five characters that travel together to the end of the book are the true embodiments of the Jewish soul. There is Uncle Saltiel, a small, neat old man, beaming with kindness and good-

natured malice. He seems so sympathetic, with his hazel-colored redingote, the cluster of jasmine that he always carries with him, his old-fashioned pantaloons and white stockings. There is Solomon, an adorable and logical little simpleton. There is the conceited Michael, and the circumspect Mattathias, who always walks with lowered eyes in the hope of picking up a pocketbook somebody had lost, and whose handkerchiefs are embroidered with the prudent devise 'This is stolen from Mattathias.'

But among these characters the one who commands most affectionate attention is the admirable Mangeclous, a great comic hero, possessed of extraordinary drollery. One cannot but love this starveling, with a multitude of professions and aliases. He is a little charlatan, always dreaming of high commercial speculations, and overflowing with ridiculous eloquence, who pursues his financial and political extravagances with marvelous poise, unimpaired by the fact that he has no shoes to put on. But he retains good spirits in spite of adversity and is indefatigable in his belief that tomorrow he will be a millionaire. In reality, he is a defenseless innocent who likes to make believe that he is a great rascal, a gay neurasthenic, that is to say, a true Jew.

The loveliness of these five offsprings of the ghetto is that they still retain the traits of enchanted children. They are so sweet-tempered, so ready to be amazed, to admire and rejoice. The child-like adoration that they feel for France is touching. And how beautifully they talk, those superb chatterboxes from the Greek island of Cephalonia! Their language is a succulent mixture of almost Racine-like melodious gentility, of imaginative and exaggerated eloquence; it abounds in Oriental poetry and has a subtle, singing rhythm. They boast an inexhaustible reserve of terrible curses and insults, which neither

the offender nor the insulted ever takes seriously. They are the true sons of the affectionate Mediterranean East.

And what optimism! Always expectant, never disappointed, they are ever ready to believe and hope. Although they are poor and have no definite professions, they delight in living. You will always find them ready to talk on all subjects, human and divine. They are nothing at all like the artificially created Jews one finds in certain novels. They have not been 'invented' in order to illustrate a thesis or to symbolize some aspect of the Jewish soul *ad usum gentilium*. They are just Jews, as one is a Breton, a Basque or a Parisian. Albert Cohen knows and loves them. In *Mangeclous* he presents them to us with profound tenderness. But the novel's humanity, its capacity for laughter, its verve gives it a much greater scope. Its freshness and robust simplicity remind one of the popular legends and great folk epics. Reading it, you are carried to the meager pastures of Judea, where a great fire had been made in the midst of the tents, and a nomad tribe is sitting around, listening to the story teller, a small, black shadow against the flames, telling long, oriental tales, sometimes stopping to give his opinion of the character, to explain a hyperbole, or answer a question.

Albert Cohen could have made an honorable career in writing a novel on the social life of Marseilles, Nice or Paris. He could have chosen a distinguished pseudonym such as, say, Saint Paul d'Aubignagne or Hubert de Frineuse. He did not, because he is a great writer and knows that, outside of his race, a writer can only write news or criticism, or mediocre imitations. A Jew, he has spoken to us of Jews, and out of the depth of his experience and traditions was able to produce such a masterpiece as *Mangeclous*.

OUR OWN BOOKSHELF

IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK. *By Max Lerner.*
New York: The Viking Press. 1938. 260
pages. \$2.50.

PROFESSOR Lerner has written a brilliant tract for the times—incisive, cogent and magistral. He has the great merit of seeing the issue so clearly himself that he compels his readers to face it upon the ground that he has chosen to occupy. 'If,' he is saying, 'you want to preserve a democratic civilization, there is a price that has to be paid. You cannot go on evading its payment. You have to choose; and you must choose while history leaves you the opportunity of self determination.' The price Professor Lerner exacts is, briefly, an admission that only a collectivist society, planned in terms of production for community consumption, can save us from the grim horrors of Fascist reaction. He is against the Communist diagnosis; he rather thinks that the price it demands will stifle the end in the means employed. He seeks to retain what is vital in the highest liberal tradition; and he argues, very persuasively, that this tradition is itself constructively related to the supreme forces in American history. He sees, clearly enough, the dark forces on the horizon; but he is convinced that if we make up our minds to act with courage and decision, there is still time for democratic civilization to triumph over its enemies.

No summary can do even the barest justice to an argument that is throughout as eloquent as it is close-knit in structure. It is the work of a man who has seen the world as it is, as well as reflected upon it from an eminence. It is, moreover, a refreshing experience to have one of the three or four most promising students of American politics speak out forthrightly on the central issues of our time without any attempt to becloud the issue by concealment of assumptions and with the courage to insist upon the validity of a definite scheme of values in political thought. In England, I suppose, we should call Professor Lerner a Left-wing Fabian Socialist; in America, radicalism seems to be the genus within which he is comprised. And he is a genuine radical in two senses: first, that there is in his thinking a sturdy individualism which makes his own experience of life his supreme teacher rather than books; and,

second, that he is driven by an inner urgency to confront the stark realities of a dying age without the effort, so dear to the academic mind, to see them, if at all possible, through rose-colored spectacles.

Professor Lerner would, I think, be the first to admit that his book is an essay in an attitude rather than a procedural structure. But it is, so far as my knowledge goes, one of the most heartening things that has come from an American university any time this last decade. It shows that the professors are getting away from concepts and description back to the evaluation of the real issues in dispute. Here, at least, is one who is not afraid to take sides and to argue for his side with a full mind and a full heart.

If I find some difficulty in accepting Professor Lerner's view, that is due, at least in part, to the fact that he writes as a young American while I write as a middle-aged European. I envy his optimism; I think the grounds upon which he builds it more slender than he is likely to admit. In the light of the Roosevelt experience I doubt whether the coöperation for which he looks is available in the time at America's disposal. I do not deny the immense educational training Americans have reserved these last six years in the idea of the positive State; all in all, that is perhaps the most remarkable of Mr. Roosevelt's achievements. My difficulty is to understand how, in these next years, Professor Lerner proposes to weld into a fighting unity the forces of progress in America.

I think, further, that he exaggerates the volume of good will there is here on the democratic side; and that he tends to underestimate the power of propaganda to fractionalize, and so dissipate, the integrated authority of that volume. I do not easily see the abdication of the great industrial empires in America before the challenge of the common man. I am dubious about the chance of adequate institutional reconstruction to give to the positive state in America the instrumentalities of which it has need. I fear, in a word, that Professor Lerner's book is an essay in the optative mood. It is a noble essay—persuasive and challenging. But I should want a good deal more historical proof than he adduces to show that America is now so different from the Old World as to