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The record companies first yielded to the demands of white and colored musicians that they be allowed to play together in 1928, when Louis Armstrong made records with such white luminaries as Jack Teagarden and Eddie Lang. Ever since then the standard of improvised jazz has improved. At the moment taste is so high that officials in certain of the companies are beginning to see the necessity of preserving the great traditional Negro blues, which are all but forgotten in the success of corruptions like the St. Louis Blues, which owe far more to sophisticated, white standards than to the traditional blues harmonies. The phonograph will soon be the only means we will have for tracing the evolution of our musical culture, since most of the pioneers have either died or changed their styles irrevocably to suit passing tastes.

Up to now there has been absolutely no interest at all expressed in this music by the pretentious, serious American composers. Most of them are not even aware of its existence, as is shown by their work. And it is still difficult to find, for the best of it still flowers in hovels, obscure alley dives, occasionally on New York's haywire Fifty-second Street and in Negro cafes and dance-halls, none of them fitting places for sheltered, subsidized artists. The phonograph, however, is continually producing samples of it, robbed, perhaps, of some of the vitality and abandon of unrehearsed real-life performance, but genuine, nevertheless. No matter what else of interest is happening, we will attempt in the future to list the best of the records still available in the market.

HENRY JOHNSON.

**Current Films**

*Follow the Fleet* (RKO-Music Hall): Navy propaganda in this musical film, though less obvious than most others, serves as a brake on Fred Astaire and his dancing. The plot is anaemic, the lyrics only so-so.

*Voice of Bugle Ann* (M.G.M.-Center): Sentimental, nostalgic little film about some Missouri farmers who raise hounds in order to spend their night "running the fox." Lionel Barrymore plays the lead and makes his part a virtual monologue, except for the voice of Bugle Ann, the canine heroine.

*Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Paramount): Once again, we may say that color is here to stay. And our worst fears for the Hollywood color film are being justified. A great deal of money and scientific research have been used to make the film look only a little worse than the penny picture postcards. The story is just about as cheap and phony as the color.

*The Prisoner of Shark Island* (20th Century-Center): A biographical film about Dr. Samuel Mudd, unjustly accused as an accomplice in the murder of Abraham Lincoln and sent to America's "Devil's Island" at Fort Jefferson, Florida. The first part of the film is quite stirring in its expose of cruel martial law and the lynch spirit. But once it gets to the prison it degenerates into a conventional prison melodrama produced with all of the skill of which John Ford is capable and also a good quota of chauvinism. P. E.

# Relief from Boredom

ROBERT FORSYTHE

THE thought that we are living through a trying period of history is perhaps common to all of us and indeed people generally take a sort of masochistic pride in the theory that they may be the last of the Mohicans. I am not at all up on Attila and Alaric or even Ghengis Khan, but I have read that after they were through with their wars very little remained alive. And yet life did go on. On this basis it may be safe to assume that even at the worst there will be humans around to continue things after a next world war, but it is almost equally certain that the majority of us will be missing.

This brings up the question of what is the point of life at a time like this. In the old settled days of 1913, a man in a country such as England knew rather well what his life was to be. If he was well-connected and had money, the chart was plain. He could almost anticipate the day of his death. In a lower stratum he was just as set. There were exceptions, naturally, but the course of life was clearly indicated. If you were rich or of noble birth, you loafed and were a gentleman; if you were born poor, you worked and hoped only that there would be work to go around. In this country it was an age of morality. Sex morality, to be sure; but the greater morality of thrift, hard work and eventually the customary course of Canal Boy to President. It was a deadly existence, which created some of the dullest people ever imagined and a war, at that time, must have been almost a Godsend to men who were so weary of their stodgy wives and stale communities that even death seemed preferable.

What started me on this train of thought was the preface to *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, which is soon to be published here by Scribner's. They ask themselves why "two aged mortals, both nearing their ninth decade, undertake a work of such magnitude?" They continue by saying that "in our retirement, with daily bread assured, we had nothing to lose by the venture." But there are other couples of seventy-five years with daily bread assured. What they are usually content to do is wait docilely for death, as they have been doing almost from the time of birth. The Webbs had nothing to lose by the venture, but "on the other hand we had a world to gain. . . . This world we have gained and enjoyed."

My feelings in the matter tend to be overheated because I am constantly coming upon congenital slaves who are so anxious to get the harness about them that they start toadying to any possible master during their grammar-school days. If death is to

be our final reward and bring the end even sooner, let's live while there is time. I'm not speaking to anybody who should think anybody out of sheer ennui alive at seventy-five among ideas—revolution seems that even the Chetwicks get their reward in the next world to being bored to death.

When asked what he had done during the French Revolution, Abbé Sieyès is reported to have said: "I have lived through it." This has always been quoted admiringly, but it strikes me as the mark of a stupid man. There are individuals who are content to be born, go through life and die. The less they are bothered en route, the happier they are. They begin waiting for the end almost as soon as they arrive. I don't know in what section the Abbé Sieyès uttered his nonsense, but it is used almost exclusively by people who speak of "living from day to day," what they never say is that they keep their minds resolutely each morning and keep them closed until sleep overcomes them at night. It absolves them from the necessity of thought or action and gives them the comforting feeling that they are being superior to life. I once had the pleasure of hearing Mr. H. G. Wells say that fascism and Communism were passing fancies which would soon run their course, but even for those who might hold this feeling, it would seem the height of folly to sit idly by and wait for the readjustment to take place automatically. That might be a process of living from day to day, which of course means the opposite of living, but the arrival of fascism in England would almost certainly ruin the pleasure of daily living for an ex-Fabian.

In the past I have had hard words to say about college students and I still have them for the usual senior who votes for *If* as his favorite poem and rushes full length into the servitude of office, factory or Wall Street with the hope only that he will be a well-beloved serf. What I am trying to do, of course, in the least astute fashion, is make revolutionaries of everybody and particularly of the young. It is the only common-sense thing and it pays practical dividends. The most obscene spectacle in the world is a man of forty whose brain is dead. No jury has any right to look askance at a wife who decides to do away with that sort of gentleman, although, by strict logic, the action should be taken by his children.

Somebody once proposed an examination every five years of all citizens, with the purpose of leading directly to the lethal cham-

ber those who could not prove they had some reason for being alive. As a consequence, the millions who were living from day to day would be spared their desultory advance to the grave and be dispatched hence forthwith. The Russian policy of the *chistka* (the Party cleaning) has a germ of the idea, but naturally on a softened scale. Since even its enemies do not deny that the Soviet Union is alive, there is probably no necessity for the full plan, but I offer it to them for future use. If there is a spark of sense left in our own civilization, it will be put into force no later than the Ides of March. I have a list of examination candidates as long as your arm. Practically all of them members of good fraternities.

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