

every civilized country in the world, that any social insurance plan built upon the principles of private insurance is foredoomed to failure. A conspicuous example is Germany, where the breakdown of the insurance system played directly into the hands of Hitler.

Social insurance, Epstein makes clear, is essentially a method of transferring part of the excessive income appropriated by the wealthiest groups back to the underpaid and the underprivileged. Whether this transfer is accomplished through unemployment benefits, old-age pensions, mothers' assistance, or disability compensation, its purpose and effect remain the same. The achievement of a real social-security program implies recognition of national responsibility for the disastrous consequences of the nation's economic activities. The present Social Security Act will collapse primarily because it evades this responsibility, because it is designed to spare the rich and tax the poor. "No system which involved the taking of contributions from poor Paul for impoverished Peter," Epstein observes, "could possibly survive long." Epstein, along with his colleagues on the Left who advocate the Frazier-Lundeen Bill, calls for sharp taxation of large incomes, large inheritances, corporate surpluses, and similar reservoirs of national wealth, to provide the indispensable means for adequate social insurance. *Insecurity—A Challenge to America*, although marred at times by conservative statistics and somewhat vitiated by its author's nineteenth-century reformism, still holds its place as one of the best documented, and one of the most reliable comprehensive treatments of social security problems we have seen.

*Toward Social Security*, a brief and simplified analysis of the Security Act, answers the questions, Who pays for the act? Who is included in its benefits? Who is excluded? What kinds and amounts of security are provided? Less trenchant than Mr. Epstein, Dr. Burns nevertheless marks the narrow limits of the act and indicates its gross inadequacy. In the light cast by either book, the boast of Secretary of Labor Perkins that the act "provides the majority of our people with a substantial measure of security in infancy and childhood, in economic crises of their working life, and in their old age" is revealed as unfounded. The fight for social security still lies ahead.

MORT and E. A. GILBERT.

## Brief Review

*MY TEN YEARS IN A QUANDARY AND HOW THEY GREW*, by Robert Benchley. Harper & Bros. \$2.50. Robert Benchley's humor is a small glass of orange juice, lighter than prune juice in color and consistency, sunnier and considerably more effective as an aid to digestion. Its Nile-green binding will match the most exacting bathroom ensemble. Many of the individual essays are as cute as Shirley Temple. Five of them are cuter. Fourteen are cuter in Alexander Woolcott. As a guide to Robert Benchley's tastes in haberdashery, autogiros, and psychiatry, it is one of the finest books published in ten years. Haste makes waste. On the other hand, a stitch in time saves nine. E. N.

# The Theater

## Hunting the Stag in New England

IF YOU get out the old geography, turn to the map of Massachusetts, and draw a straight line from Northampton to Wellesley, another from Wellesley to South Hadley, and a third from South Hadley back to Northampton, you will have enclosed in a long isosceles triangle the dark and bloody ground that is the most dangerous spot in North America for the unsuspecting eligible male. Here the lovely young things from Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Wellesley range in packs, making the night hideous with their silvery pealing laughter and their rapid-fire repartee. A mere man wandering into this dangerous territory is, as Hickory Jim used to say, a gone raccoon.

Or so, at any rate, Mr. Philip Barry, in his new play that opened at the Empire the other night, would have us believe. And for corroboration he has this to offer: the original script from which he adapted *Spring Dance* was written by Eleanor Golden and Eloise Barrangon, two young ladies of Northampton. They should know.

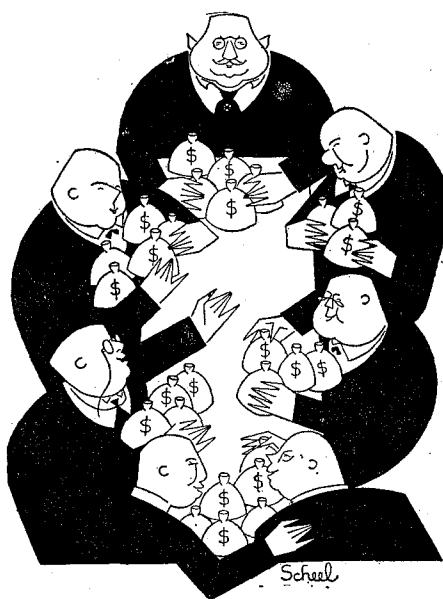
The play tells the story of how one such pack, in a nice way, got its man—and, indeed, there was something about it of the from-each-according-to-his-ability-to-each-according-to-his-need idea, too, because of the four young ladies, only one needed the young man (and she needed him bad, because it was love with her), but hadn't the stuff to get him single-handed. The others didn't want him, but brought him down for her because she was one of the gang; all there was in it for them was the satisfaction of a good job well done.

Which, it must be confessed, is both something more and something less than Mr. Barry can have got out of writing this play.

Something less because *Spring Dance* seems likely to make him quite a little money; something more because while the play is certainly well done, it can hardly be called a good job in the sense that it is an effort worthy of Mr. Barry's talent. And when one says "well done" about *Spring Dance*, it doesn't mean mere precisian craftsmanship and glibness. The author has had the wit to hold off his comedy until he has had a chance to get his audience solidly interested in his situation by letting them glimpse a little serious and honest heartbreak. When he has shown that on the part of the girl, and made the boy out to be something of a heel suffering from Noel Cowardice, then, of course, he can allow the girls to loose the hounds of horseplay and Machiavellian plotting without (1) making the audience feel that the goings-on are oh so unimportant, and (2) making the audience regard the girls as a lot of blankety-blank buttinskys. Also, he (or the Northampton young ladies) has brought into the lines the authentic speech of the bourgeois collegiate young, Model 1936, in all its self-conscious, circumlocutory hardness. A document, therefore, ladies and gentlemen; but from a less capable wordsmith than Mr. Barry, I'll take vanilla. It must be said, further, that Mr. Barry shows himself in touch with the times when he has his romantically wanderlustful hero choose the Soviet Union as the place he must visit for contact with the Big, the Vital, the Free. And of course there are the gags, which really make the play. Beautifully spaced and timed (in which Director Jed Harris functions with his usual expertness), they go off not like a string of firecrackers, but like Roman candles: explosive, but without confusion and with a momentary lingering grace. The youngsters in the cast (with special laurels for three or four of them) do a good job all around.

But coming out of the theater onto the hot sidewalks of Broadway, you realize that nothing much has happened. You're pretty mad anyway because you suddenly realize that you've been sweltering inside (comes the revolution, legit theaters will be cooled); you get all the madder when you realize that the thing that made you forget the heat, the superior talent of the playwright, has been spent on something not quite worthy of an adult mind. There are so many more exciting and dramatic things in life, including other things that go on at New England girls' colleges. But Mr. Barry is nobody's fool, and he writes like a streak. Perhaps it is not too fatuous to hope that some day he'll shake off the hobbles and hit his real stride.

ALEXANDER TAYLOR.



Schell

# The Screen

THE current crop of movie offerings is about average, which means none outstandingly good, a few that are passable entertainment and are interesting for other reasons, and a few that can be regarded only as inferior ways of killing time. One thing about this week's showings: three of them use the movement of social forces as background material.

One of these is *The General Died at Dawn*. It hurts us to report that the preview of this film, excerpts from the scenario of which were published in the NEW MASSES of July 28, was a disappointment to the liberals and radicals—not to mention the cinema theoreticians—who had been invited. Some of the strong lines quoted in the NEW MASSES article are properly pointed up by Lewis Milestone's direction and are feelingly delivered by Gary Cooper, but the main context of the picture is (excuse the expression) slop, in the general tradition of the Cooper-Dietrich mysterious glamorous lady with a heart of gold and the hard-fisted lone-wolf adventurer, also with a heart of gold.

The fact that O'Hara (Gary Cooper) is adventuring in the cause of the Chinese peasantry against the war lord Yang (Akim Tamiroff, of the old Moscow Art Theater) pales into insignificance beside the see-saw of love and hate between him and Judy (Madeleine Carroll). Just whose fault it is, is hard to say. Milestone's direction was sharply criticized by some of the weissenheimers as being both ragged and self-conscious, while others razzed Odets for allowing his first film to turn out so disappointingly. Still others pointed out that someone named Booth had written the story, which Odets had merely scenarized, and that the worst thing about the picture was that it followed the old box-office formula, a fact which could be accounted for by Paramount's production policy without anyone else being at all at fault. Let's agree that it is a disappointment from the left-wing and "artistic" point of view. And then let's admit that for a film of its kind, some of the lines and some of the direction and most of the acting and photography are better than average.

Another film placed against a background of social forces is *To Mary—With Love*, the new Myrna Loy vehicle. Here the changing economic life of America from 1926 to 1936 is used as the basic character and situation determiner in the lives of an upper-middle-class couple. We see them marrying in 1926, developing strained relations along toward 1929, when the husband (Warner Baxter) is money-crazy, coming together again when the crash has him flat on his back and he needs a woman's care, going apart again when the partial recovery has given him enough of a break for his wife (whom he has alienated by infidelity) to feel he can get along without her. The final reconciliation, however, is not effected by the social forces, but by the faith-

ful friend of both (Ian Keith), who is, alas, fruitlessly in love with the lady. This is another old formula, of course, but the motivations give it more than ordinary meaning and credibility. There's an interesting use of documentation: the old Waldorf, where they're married, is before us in the life; there are newsreels of the second Dempsey-Tunney fight and of Lindbergh's return; and there are newspaper quotes from prominent jackasses on the meaning of the depression—quotes which first appeared in the *New Yorker* and later reappeared in a book called *Boners* issued by Viking Press. The fact that Hoover and Coolidge are among those quoted, greatly to their disadvantage, plus the fact that the T.V.A. project is favorably referred to by Miss Loy, give the film a special edge in these campaign days. Sense and sensibility are constantly at war in the picture, to the distress of the onlooker, but one of Miss Loy's lines is strong enough to shatter the context and speak volumes. "Everyone keeps saying," she says, "that the movies should be more like life. I think life should be more like the movies." The story is by Richard Sherman, a young man who in 1933 published a story in *Vanity Fair* sneering at what he regarded as the temporary fad for radical political thinking.

In *The Gorgeous Hussy*, you will be surprised to learn, Miss Joan Crawford steps forth as a champion of the principle that if love clashes with politics, love can go hang. It is really not her idea, of course, she being merely the puppet of dat ole devil Samuel Hopkins Adams, who wrote the story. But you must admit that such a notion in a Crawford picture is really something. It sounds like a propaganda film, doesn't it? Well, it is: propaganda for the Jacksonian position on maintaining the federal Union. Accordingly, the lice and rats of this picture are the

Secessionists. The conflict between Union sovereignty and States' Rights is the background of the picture (with little or no mention of the economic reasons for the clash), in which Jackson and his wife, Daniel Webster, Calhoun, and John Randolph are characters. Besides Miss Crawford, the leading performers are Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, Franchot Tone, Robert Taylor, and Alison Skipworth.

*Swing Time*, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, is a disappointment. The faults are two: a very dull, trite story and inferior tunes. It's definitely below both *Follow the Fleet* and *Top Hat*. It's worth seeing, however, for the dancing, which is up to standard, for the top-notch comedy of Helen Broderick and Victor Moore, and for the Moment with the Policeman, in which the state power is shown nakedly in its role as the executive committee of the propertied class.

*Girls' Dormitory* is the initial American vehicle of the young French actress Simone Simon. Mr. Darryl Zanuck, with the aid of plentiful publicity and ecstatic close-ups, is trying to create a girl star for 20th Century-Fox. It is, however, impossible at this time to tell very much about the young lady's capabilities, since the film is so mediocre. It takes its cue from *Maedchen in Uniform* and suffers by comparison. What is lacking in *Girls' Dormitory*, which is the study of young love in a regimented German boarding school for girls, is everything that its pre-Hitler German relative had: simplicity, sincerity, and artfulness.

In *The Case of the Velvet Claws*, Detective Warren William continues to detect as debonairly as usual in another Perry Mason mystery, if that interests you. In this film, Claire Dodd seems definitely to have consolidated her position as a nice girl; perhaps this is because in the other roles she was uncomfortably capable of producing an impression extreme bitchiness. Everybody ought to better suited by the new arrangement.

BOB WHITE

# Music

TWO invaluable books dealing with every phase of recorded music have been published this summer, thereby giving the music world its first documented accounts of the astonishing scope of phonograph recording in the past decade. For the music lover, Robert Darrell's *Gramophone Shop Encyclopedia* (with foreword by Lawrence Gilman) is a veritable godsend, being as it is the first complete compilation of the recorded works of serious composers. Even the most ardent admirers of the phonograph will be astonished at the initiative of the companies in recording virtually all the great works in the symphonic, operatic, chamber-music, and solo-instrumental repertoires along with the hackneyed trash that used to be their sole output.

Darrell, who has devoted the past four years to this work, has included the available catalogues of every record company in the world, with the exception of the negligible output of the Soviet Union's gramophone trust. Every composer of any appreciable worth from Palestrina to our most dubious moderns is included in the *Encyclopedia*, with a brief biographical note and full details as to the recorded performances of his works: the artist, make and cost of the record, and catalogue number. Although the Gramophone Shop's initiative in financing this work is greatly to be commended, there is little doubt that they will profit greatly from it, since many of the imported recordings are available only through their store.

In only one particular is the work inacc-