

The Oxford lecturer claims that "the scientist of today is often cynically indifferent to the early history of his subject." Just imagine Professor Oppenheimer refusing to consider Mendeleev's periodic table, or Mosely's atomic numbers or Thomson's electron or the Curies' discoveries in radio-activity! To this snobbish scientist the terms "scientific worker" is abhorrent; it "lends itself to use by those who would surreptitiously insinuate some special bond of unity between the scientist and the factory worker." This section of the book reads like something out of a Dies Committee report and reminds one of the time when the retired Congressman from Texas condemned sociology as a subversive doctrine. One expects more intelligence from even a reactionary scientist.

Of course, such a book could not be complete without an attack on the USSR. Dr. Baker asserts that Soviet scientists have done nothing outstanding. He ignores Kapitza's fundamental work on the superfluid state, Lysenko's research and applications in the field of vernalization, the famous restoration of life experiments, the organization of blood banks and Red Army medicine. The outstanding British and American research workers who attended the 220th anniversary celebration of the Soviet Academy reported a high quality of work, with the Russians leading in the biological and agricultural sciences. They declared that in about twenty years the scientists of the USSR would be in the leadership in most fields. Testifying at the atomic energy hearings of the Senate Dr. Irving Langmuir said, "the Russians have a tendency to proceed at a more rapid rate than we do." Dr. Baker's fulminations belong on the museum shelf along with the racial theories of Hitler and the philosophy of Herbert Hoover.

JAMES KNIGHT.

Love Stuff

REPRIEVE, by Warwick Deeping. Dial. \$2.50.
WOMAN WITHOUT LOVE, by Andre Maurois. Harper. \$2.50.

A LADY LIKE THE MOON, by Genevieve Wimsatt. Bernard Ackerman. \$2.75.

OF THIS trio of unexciting novels of "love," *Reprieve* is the one of a man who, when told he has only a few months to live, leaves his family, travels, finds a true love and discovers he is really in good health. He thereupon settles down like dust on one of Warwick Deeping's books, of which there are more than five dozen.

Woman Without Love is undistinguished except for its unusual subject—frigidity. The objective characterization of an inhibited adult is credible enough, but Maurois is less convincing in his tracing of the course. From the evidence she might have caught her affliction from the author's adjectives. We get "frigid staircase," "frigid tower stairs," "frigid exterior," "ironic and frigid," "frigid soul," etc. From a strictly medical point of view, this frigid atmosphere, plus her "damp sheets," should have given her arthritis.

A Lady Like the Moon is an imaginative biography of a legendary seventeenth-century Chinese beauty. It has touches of excellent craftsmanship but the author is not able to overcome the sketchiness inherent in a narrative covering a period of fifty-six years.

MACK ENNIUS.

Worth Noting

THE Poetry Society is offering a \$100 first prize and a fifty-dollar second prize in their Lola Ridge Memorial award for poems of social significance. Final date for entries is Jan. 1, 1946. Manuscripts should be sent to Gustav Davidson, 227 E. 45th St., New York City.

ACCORDING to rumors the New York *Daily News* has been feeling the effect of the reader-advertiser boycott so much that it has begun to censor the O'Donnell copy. Rumor has it that a choice O'Donnellism calling Benedict Arnold a piker as compared to Roosevelt when it came to selling out the country, was one of the blue-pencilled items.

A GIFT of a cigarette box to Albert Maltz, who wrote the script of *The House I Live In*, from Frank Sinatra, who sang in it, carried the inscription inside the cover: "Dear Albert: *The House I Live In* is the house you live in. Let's pack the house."

The Soviet Novel

(Continued from page 16)

was an apolitical book. What childishness that is! Politics is one of the basic struggles of mankind; war itself, by definition of Clausewitz, is an armed extension of politics.

How, then, could a war book be apolitical? What is this insane nullification on the part of our critics that leads them to shower with praise any man who has no point of view? What sort

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of a human being can go through life with no point of view?

As a matter of fact, Simonov's new book is intensely political; it is naive to think that a Soviet writer could come to maturity under socialism and write a full length novel of the war, which socialism fought for survival, and at the same time produce a novel with no political content! When you read Simonov's book, you find a constant interrelation of (1) the hero, (2) the battalion he commands, (3) the regiment of which the battalion is a part, (4) the division, (5) the army corps that defends Stalingrad, (6) The Red Army that defended the whole of the Soviet Union, (7) the Soviet people who stand behind the Red Army, and last Stalin, the commander in chief. Woven into this, and through it, is the role of the Communist Party of Russia as the coordinating force. It is the philosophy of the writer, his relation to his own society, that enables him to integrate all these parts into a fluid, exciting and dramatic whole. At times he does this overtly, as for example when, dog-tired after a battle, he and his political commissar listen to Stalin's speech on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the October Revolution. At other times he does it far more subtly, but emphasizes over and over the bond that connects the Russian soldier with the Russian people. You never feel that Saburov, the hero, fights alone; he fights as part of a people, as part of a society, of an idea, of a plan. This is the reality of life, the dialectic reality of many, many forces always in motion, always affecting each other.

Yet it's rather pathetic to note obliquely that even the translator of this book, Joseph Barnes, stated in a publicity release that three kinds of Americans would not like Simonov's book: reactionaries, Trotskyites and Communists. There's the parting note in a discussion of reality and the Soviet writer. A Soviet writer, who is a member of the Communist Party, writes a book about the greatest life and death struggle the Communist Party of any land ever led—and yet this translator has the gall to predict that Communists of other lands will dislike the book!

The world we live in is a very real world. A writer who approaches it on any other basis than an understanding of its many complexities will always to a degree fail; the lesser writer who approaches this same world with both humanism and a scientific approach to the forces concerned will, to a larger degree, succeed.

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SIGHTS and SOUNDS

THE IMPORTATION LEADS AGAIN

By JOSEPH FOSTER

A QUARTET of Swiss film-makers—Lazar Wechsler, producer, Leopold Lindtberg, director, Richard Schweitzer, writer, and Emil Berna, cameraman—can give us lessons in the making of war films, as was shown in *Mary Louise* and now, again, in *The Last Chance*. In *Mary Louise*, their concern was the child refugee; in *The Last Chance* (Criterion) they deal with adult refugees escaping from Italy to Switzerland. Their films lack the slicktrick technique of the Americans, but they are far ahead of us in the more important qualities of realism and sensitivity.

The photography in *The Last Chance* is so like the work of Pudovkin that some of these men might have studied with him. Each shot is carefully composed with reference to physical meaning. The use of sky, reeds and water as a frame for the actors gives a sharp sense of the character of the country. Whereas these producers used the Alps in *Mary Louise* as an anodyne for the bombed-out children, here these same peaks loom as a menace to the fleeing refugees. Backgrounds thus both contribute atmosphere and enter into and underline the action.

Dramatic interest is introduced with the very first scene. A Nazi prison train enroute to Germany from Italy is bombed, enabling the prisoners to escape, among them an American and an English flyer, who figure as the central characters in the story. Both these actors, actual flyers interned in Switzerland for the duration, play their roles with fresh and instinctive realism. But for the sake of the script they are somewhat distorted as people, and compelled to unnatural, boorish behavior, in order to stress the picture's moral: that the end purpose of anti-fascism is the universal humanity that the world needs for survival.

It is worked out as follows: The two English-speaking flyers, feeling themselves superior to the Italians who help them in their escape, grumble about their conditions. This attitude reaches a climax at the Italian-Swiss frontier town,

where the American refers to the refugees at the inn as "a bunch of jerks." When the guide who is to lead them over the mountains is killed, the issue is abruptly shoved into the open. Should the soldiers take the refugees with them or assure their own escape by going it alone?

With the Nazi patrols coming closer, the refugees face certain death unless they are helped. The director shrewdly weights the argument in their favor by introducing each with thorough care. The camera dwells upon their careworn faces, their pitiable, threadbare belongings. There is Hillel, the Polish Jew, on the move since 1938, with Chanele, his frail niece; an anti-fascist German woman and her young son, whose eyes speak more than a volume of words; a Yugoslav worker; a professor clutching a battered suitcase containing his life work on minorities in Europe, and a group of Italian children. No human being could stand up against the combined eloquence of their needs. In the quiet acquiescence of the flyers is contained a note of human triumph that no handshakes, appropriate chords of music or sudden sun bursts could equal.

The straggling, desperate climb over the mountains provides the film with some of its best moments: the old Jew praying to his God as he struggles through the snow, the company catching a hasty respite in a ruined mountain shack, singing the French round *Frere Jacques*, in cracked, tired voices; the mad scramble to make the last few yards to safety as the Nazi patrol catches up, the weary relief in the Swiss frontier station. Most of the actors are refugees, but even the professionals look the part. This accounts for the bone-aching reality that gives the film its tremendous wallop.

The dialogue for the most part is English, but some five or six additional languages are used, with good titles keeping the meaning clear. The Jews speak Yiddish, and act and look as you would expect them to. This reflects a bit of honesty that Hollywood never

permits. Except for the brief interlude in *None Shall Escape*, even films combatting anti-Semitism (however rare) make their Jews as non-Jewish as possible.

IF WE have been fortunate in our importations, we have not been so lucky with our Hollywood pictures. Except for the name players, it is difficult to distinguish one pirate picture or musical from another. Scorning the real world around it, Hollywood means to ride us around in a Tunnel of Love, or keep us wrapped up in riddles by Agatha Christie. Maybe our film giants figure that during the Christmas season (that begins with the shop-early-and-often signs) people are in high spirits engendered by the end of the war or by the more customary stimulants, and hence unable to distinguish steak from marshmallow.

The loudest merchandise current is the pretentious *Saratoga Trunk*, which contains the best and the worst of Hollywood. It is beautifully constructed, reflecting painstaking research and special effects. It includes a railroad collision that European producers would give their eye teeth to be able to duplicate, New Orleans Creole interiors, and gowns that make you forget about technicolor.

But when you've said all this you've said everything good about it. Instead of cinematic movement you get lots of moving around—trains, people, horses, buggies constantly rushing from place to place. Imbedded in this large background are Ingrid Bergman, as a Creole beauty, and Gary Cooper, a dashing, gambling Texan, who makes her roll over and say daddy. The relationship between them is so synthetic that, deprived of all the trappings, it would not survive an old time two-reeler. Behavior motivation is based upon Bergman's choice for marriage between a scion of wealth and the gambler. Naturally, since the wealthy suitor is *not* played by Cooper, the wealthy suitor is the stinker, a comparison which led a friend of mine to remark "poverty isn't everything."