

The Film Forum

AFTERMATH OF WAR *The Saturday Review's Weekly Guide to Selected 16mm. Sound Films.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: With Eisenhower's war memoirs still high on the best-seller list (if that means anything these days), and Churchill's new book crowding them for popularity, we pick out this week two films on the war and its aftermath—one a report on the people of Britain, the other the joint allied record of the Normandy invasion and the great sweep into Germany.

A YANK COMES BACK

Produced by the Crown Film Unit, England, for the Central Office of Information, written and produced by Burgess Meredith. Available from British Information Services, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. (43 mins.)

In this astonishing film, by Burgess Meredith out of Olsen and Johnson, hell's still a-poppin' from every corner of the screen. "Buzz" Meredith reported on England during the war in a delightful film which swept up Bob Hope in an uproarious episode in a taxi, with the British currency system getting the biggest ribbing of all time.

Now Buzz is back to see what's been happening in England since his GI days. But instead of a peaceful conducted tour (for of course he stars in his own picture), the audience is treated to the biggest dose of cinematic high-jinks since our two famous comedians started hanging from the top of the film frame when the projectionist went hay-wire.

No one should be surprised when Buzz addresses the screen and finds it answering back in a rich Scots accent; when changes of scene are announced on a studio "take-board" something like the rustics' famous "Wall" in "The Midsummer Night's Dream"; and when the camera, panning away from Jeanne de Casalis in a completely fantastic interview, encounters her all over again, pans away and again picks her up, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Unhappily, the tricks of transition are so many that the film never catches its breath; it becomes itself one immensely long and complicated transition. It is always on the move, and the audience, like Alice in Wonderland, must run as fast as it can merely in order to stand still. Buzz Meredith certainly gets around, pursued by his kilted camera—a camera on two legs. He climbs a gasometer to find at the top a painter who is also a statistician; but his cameraman, clinging perilously to a rail, loses his balance and carries the audience crashing to the ground far below. He interviews some housewives enjoying their traditional grouse as they wait in line outside the butcher's; returning home with one of them, he discovers that, in spite of meat rationing, she still manages to be a wrestling champion, who proceeds to throw him

and his ubiquitous camera out the window.

Thus the audience reels and rollicks along from one zany episode to another, in each discovering a long-faced and lugubrious Burgess Meredith dragging facts out of the British people for a movie script he has failed to write by the time he has to pack his bag at the end of the picture. The impression he gets and passes along is unhappily a bit nebulous. This being a Government-sponsored (and therefore non-partisan) film, we aren't let into the secret that Britain is now a Socialized country—though we do see something of state-owned aircraft research, pre-natal clinics, free milk schemes, and other widely shared benefits of the Welfare State.

On the other hand, an audience unfamiliar with this new film language might be pardoned for thinking that most of Britain was on its way to the nut-house—not perhaps a frame of mind to be induced when a ten-per-cent cut in ERP is looming in Congress.

Future historians of the film will rank this one with "Hellzapoppin'" rather than with the staid, Gladstonian British documentary film. Maybe this is a healthy sign. For all the virtues of the documentary tradition, it will not hold people's attention unless it can warm their hearts and set them laughing. With "A Yank Comes Back," it and the audience experience the same salutary shaking up.

THE TRUE GLORY

Produced by the combined film units of the Allied High Command. Available from Film Program Services, 1173 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

This massive and powerfully-wrought film tells the story of the Allied campaign in Europe from the preparations for invasion to the capitulation of Germany. When there is so much talk of another war, it is wholesome to remind ourselves sometimes of what the last one was really like.

Consciously constructed in the style of Hardy's "The Dynasts," the film puts its explanatory passages into blank verse, spoken over finely conceived picture maps which show the grand strategy of attack. The body of the film tells of the soldier's war. It is a tapestry of voices: every variety of American accent and British dialect, Polish, Czech, Canadian, Australian, French—each recounting his own episode in the advance. And through them all weaves the kindly, reassuring voice of Ike Eisenhower.

"Now the time has come," says the narrator near the end, "to put our victory to the test of peace." Four years have passed since those words were written. What have we to show for them?

—RAYMOND SPOTTISWOODE.

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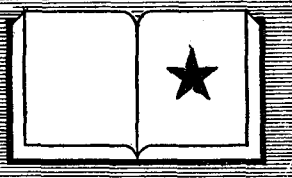
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NEW EDITIONS



IT will be a mixed bag of books this week, thanks to the press of titles deserving attention, but every volume included is heartily recommended, no matter how briefly noted.

First there is "The Portable Charles Lamb" (Viking, \$2), edited by John Mason Brown, who has chosen wisely from Lamb's assorted writings, and provided an introduction worthy of the author with whom it deals. Particularly happy was the decision to include so many of Lamb's revealing letters. This volume would prove good reading anywhere, but I happened to enjoy it while overlooking the Pacific, during a week end at Laguna, so it will always be pleasantly associated in my mind with a blue sea and a blue sky and white gulls flying. A companion volume well worth owning is "The Portable Sherwood Anderson," ably edited and introduced by Horace Gregory. Anderson was an uneven writer, particularly in his novels, but his best stories promise to prove durable. Here we have "Poor White" complete, tales from "Winesburg" and other stories, some letters, and a few brief sketches—a sound collection. A line from Lamb might serve as a fit epigraph for these two satisfying Portables and their fellows: "To be strong-backed and neat-bound is the desideratum of a volume. Magnificence comes after."

André Gide's "Dostoevsky" (New Directions, \$2.50), first translated in 1925, is small in size but large in content; valuable not only for its insights into the work and nature of Dostoevsky, and for the illuminating remarks on life and literature that are Gide's specialty, but also for what it has to say about the character of the Russian people, particularly their passion for public confession—a passion that long antedates the purge trials which have so puzzled the Western world. Gide may or may not be the great novelist that many think him, but he is surely a brilliant critic of life and letters, and a moraliste of the first order.

Homer W. Smith's "Kamongo, or The Lungfish and the Padre" (Viking, \$2.50), which has enjoyed a quiet and deserved reputation since its first appearance in 1932, should find many new readers now that it has been reissued. "Kamongo" is a physiologist's statement of his intellectual position in the face of life's mysteries, cast in the form of an engaging and

graceful dialogue between the writer and a priest, homeward bound through the Suez Canal. It is the statement of a scientist who is content to accept a universe in which there is process but no purpose; of a thinker whose speculations regarding evolution and life force are original, fascinating. A fine piece of writing.

There is no room here, even were there the ability, to reappraise the value of Byron's poetry, but a reading of "Don Juan" in the attractive John Lehmann edition (\$3.50), and a number of Byron's other works in the new Everyman's complete edition of the "Poems" (Dutton, 3 vols., \$1.45 each), convinces me that such a reappraisal is desirable. Byron's reputation soared, then sank; it has risen recently, but not enough. It is high time that a new generation rediscovered "Don Juan," in particular, with its marvelous variety, exuberance, incisive wit, verbal brilliance, and worldly wisdom. And, after "Don Juan," let the discoverers turn to "The Vision of Judgment."

"Twenty-five Modern Plays" (Harper, \$4.75), edited by S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer, is the most interesting anthology in its field that I have seen. Beginning with "Rosmersholm," ending with "Command Decision," and working its way through such various dramatists as Gorky, Hauptmann, Benavente, and Karel Capek, it also contains notable experiments by Georg Kaiser, Cocteau, Auden, and Isherwood. Another useful, established Harper anthology is "Typical Elizabethan Plays" (\$5), edited by Felix E. Schelling and Matthew W. Black. And those of us who were brought up on The Mermaid Series will welcome the readable reprints of "Ben Jonson," "Congreve," "Webster and Tourneur," and "Marlowe," now issued by A. A. Wyn (\$3 each).

H. N. Brailsford's "Voltaire" (Oxford, Home University Library, \$2), is the best brief life of Voltaire that I know; although I do not agree with the author's explanation of *l'infame* . . . Oxford is also giving us an "Illustrated Dickens" that should please old and new readers. These handy volumes—of which "Pickwick," "Copperfield," "Bleak House," and "A Tale of Two Cities" (\$3.50 each) have appeared—are distinguished by plates remade from the original illustrations.

—BEN RAY REDMAN.

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