

THE DANGERS OF DEMI-FASCISM

Progress. There is no chosen race, but the 'progressive' races have earned by their own efforts the right to dominate the world. Peace as between such higher races is a desideratum because in peace all can contribute to Progress in the highest measure. Internationalism is only rejected because it is obviously impracticable and because the force of national loyalty and tradition can serve to cement the classes of the State and prevent waste of energy in disputes, strikes, political controversies, etc.

This has been the chief danger of Italian Fascism, originated, we must remember, by an ex-socialist and internationalist. But the genius of Mussolini seems to have grasped the need, as the tradition of the Italian people felt the want, of a truly spiritual religion. None the less, traces of this almost communist spirit could still be discerned in the utterances of Mussolini until very recently. No full report of his latest epoch-making speech is yet in the writer's hands. But he is reported as saying, 'We have rejected the theory of the economic man. The economic man does not exist; the integral man exists, who is political, religious, who is a saint, a warrior.' That is enough to reassure us as to the future of Italian Fascism.

HERBERT SHOVE.

VERY SILLY SYMPHONY

I ALWAYS read with the greatest interest the pronouncements of the two schools of theatrical critics of the Film, the 'whole-hoggers' and the 'half-and-halfers': fairly represented respectively by Mr. St. John Ervine and Mr. Sydney Carrol. Mr. Ervine and the whole-hoggers—with whom I am not going to bother either myself or my readers here—regard a Cinema as exclusively a place for nit-wits to which nobody of the intelligence of Mr. Ervine would ever resort, unless the Film happens to be an exact repro-

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duction of a successful stage play. The only reason advanced for the popularity of the Cinema is that admirably comfortable seats are provided, and that Jack and Jill can spend a much pleasanter evening there than at home. The half-and-halfers treat the Cinema with a benign tolerance, regarding it as the Theatre's rather inky baby brother, who requires occasional pats on the back but must on no account be spoiled by over lavish praise. 'If,' wrote Mr. Carrol, in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* some Thursdays ago, 'you have any regard for the beauty and clarity of English speech correctly spoken, the grace and charm of English manners (in proper exposition), the sympathy and comprehension of English understanding, see that these precious things receive their tribute in the only place where they can be practised and reviewed at their best, the English Theatre.' Now that may be very true and noble, but it led me to ask the question, is it relevant to the topic of the relations of the Theatre and the Film? The art of the Film should not, so all its greatest exponents constantly tell us, compete with the art of the Theatre; it should be complementary to it. And this led me on to the following rather random reflections. If you push this argument to its extreme, it might be urged that the Film is most true to itself when it is furthest distant from the Theatre; when in fact it is literally a moving picture. Now that seemed to me not only to affect the problem of Speech and the Film, but to go far deeper and only to touch rock bottom when we come up against the problem of Realism and the Film. I will grant that one way of telling a story on the films is by showing a connected sequence of photographs of the actors as they work towards some particular end. Some films show random shots of people who give the impression of being about nothing in particular, or alternatively of being plum crazy, and so tell no story at all; as to these I am inclined to agree with Mr. Ervine, but as Thomas Dekker's Shoemaker's wife was always ejaculating, 'Let that pass.' The real point is this: surely the film is, from its nature, even more at home when the drawings of Mr. Disney move and have their being before us than when the

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pale shadow of Miss Garbo's beauty makes us long the more keenly for its reality? After all, we are getting Mr. Disney at first hand, when we are only getting Miss Garbo at second hand.

I have recently seen three of Mr. Disney's Silly Symphonies—*Flowers and Trees*, *Santa's Workshop*, and *Father Noah's Ark*. Their differences make me envious of the fertility of their creator's invention, but they all have this rather striking similarity: that, quite apart from their humour, they appeal by reason of one underlying quality, which I can only call the quality of Symmetry. Let me explain; a good painting, like a good building or a great symphony, essentially has exactness of proportion and balance; well; so have Mr. Disney's cartoons. The colouring is at present crude, for the art of screen reproduction in colour is still in its infancy; but the drawing is admirable: so admirable that the eye is entertained even when the mind is not amused. The thing is, in fact, very literally a moving picture, as opposed to a moving photograph. Sound accompaniment, witty dialogue, a taste for satire, doubtless all contribute to Mr. Disney's success. I personally always look forward to seeing him having a gentle prod at the inanity of Mass Production (specially good example, the way they stick the tails on the horses in Santa's workshop); I have met other people who admire more his admirable intellectual faculty for seeing everything from a slightly different angle from everyone else; but I think the real basis of his success is his superb sense for Form, coupled with a complete mastery of the craft of draughtsmanship. In short, then, I am all in favour of the Screen showing us the pranks of creatures born entirely of the artist's imagination; in my more fantastic moments I long for the day when the vigorous grotesques of the Gothic shall perform on the screen their whirling dance of adoration or despair, as I am sure their mediaeval creators would desire them to. All of which, Mr. Carroll, has nothing to do with the 'beauty and clarity of English speech,' or with any of the other topics of which you are, quite rightly of course, so jealous and careful a guardian.

BLACKFRIARS

But soft, I hear some reader remind me of my recently-expressed admiration for René Clair and the French Realists. Oh, my jolly pedant, the film is an art embracing many things; by Heaven, you shall not nail me down to my Very Silly Symphony; some day I shall go sane again.

HUGH BERRY.

TRACKING DOWN THE BARON CORVO

THE essential interest of the 'Experiment in Biography' by means of which Mr. A. J. A. Symons tells us what his ingenious patience has pieced together about Frederic William Rolfe, the 'spoilt priest' who has definitely taken his place in Victorian letters, depends on the fact—presented by Mr. Symons with a mass of accumulated evidence—that he was a congenital Invert. Once this has been realized the course of his wasted life is comprehensible. Without this clue we might well ask ourselves what all the fuss was about.

Born in Victorian London, and received into the Catholic Church at twenty-six years of age, Rolfe presents all the ear-marks of his kind. 'Bright, attractive, a natural Catholic . . . interested in drawing, music, and the arts, not over given to sport,' as Mr. Symons says, he might have sublimated his Inversion under the spur and curb of Catholic asceticism to become a useful priest. Yet 'somehow' he met 'squalls' at Oscott, 'somehow' he was expelled from the Scots College, 'somehow' he lapsed into vicissitudes at Christchurch and Aberdeen, 'somehow' he failed to convince either Franciscans or Jesuits, until 'somehow' he became the man of 'many queer friendships' who never made a friend, and finished up by purchasing the favours

¹ *The Quest for Corvo. An Experiment in Biography.* By A. J. A. Symons. (Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1934.)