

THE FILMGOER IN PARIS

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THERE are plenty of things to do in Paris, besides going to the cinema, and plenty to see besides films; but if that is what you want to do and see, Paris is a very good place to be. This is, naturally, one of the aspects of Paris in which I have been specially interested, and after about three months I have come to the conclusion that if you have patience, if you keep your eyes open, if you regularly consult the weekly guide to all the shows, and if you join enough cine-clubs and societies, then there is almost no film which you cannot in time hope to see. You may even, if you are lucky, see a film which no longer exists.

No longer exists officially, that is. I refer to the Carné-Prévert production *Le Jour se Lève*, of which all copies were supposed to be destroyed when the Americans bought up the rights and Hollywood turned it into *The Long Night*. In fact, one copy was placed in British National Film Library with the strict understanding that it shall never be shown, even to students of the cinema, until the American company possessing the rights gives permission; and quite clearly, at least one other copy escaped the order for a general massacre, since I have seen it in Paris. It is even possible, I suppose, that the Americans permit this; that they do concede to French filmgoers the right to see one of the admitted masterpieces of their national cinema—though I did have the impression that the print which I saw at a cine-society screening was one which somebody had started deliberately to mutilate, but had been half-hearted about it, finally slipping the print under the counter before the job was finished, in order to resurrect it later for semi-private showing.

If this is what happened I am grateful to that unknown rescuer, whatever his motives, because, for me anyway, the anger which any lover of the cinema must feel when he watches the film industry committing cannibalism among its brain-children (it happened before in the case of *Gaslight*) is tempered somewhat by the fact that I have at least been able to see *Le Jour se Lève*. And though I haven't seen the Hollywood version, starring Henry Fonda, and though I don't want to seem to be re-opening what is perhaps a closed issue in the columns of *The Listener*, I am quite sure after seeing the French original, and despite the imperfections of the print, that Hollywood's *The Long Night* can have been only a poor and emasculated imitation. I am sure of this for the simple reason that the story, as treated by Carné and Prévert, with Jean Gabin as the star, would defy translation into the Hollywood medium, even though whole sequences of *The Long Night* have apparently been lifted—without credit—straight from the original. The subtle psychological implications of the plot (for instance, the "villain," played by Jules Bertly with a magnificent sense of evil, is here the father of the "heroine," and the motives which inspire him are consequently a strange mixture of sadism, masochism, and father-love) would be much too adult and "shocking" for the American censors even if the uncompromising

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by GORDON MIRAMS

tragedy of the finale were acceptable at the box-office. (Hollywood, I'm told, allows the decent, hunted young man to escape his doom in the beleaguered apartment-house and by so doing ruins the Grecian inevitability of events upon which the whole drama depends.)

THIS is not by any means the only notable French film I have seen these last few weeks. There is, for example, *Monsieur Vincent*, a drama of the 16th Century based on the life of St. Vincent de Paul, and with Pierre Fresnay in the title role. It is one of the very few films which I would describe as truly "religious," not because it was made in a Catholic country or because it deals with the life of the extraordinary little priest who was a pioneer of social welfare work, and who was later declared a Saint, but because, in the words of another critic, the "religious atmosphere flows out of the very essence of the theme, and there is no conscious effort to edify or astonish or wheedle one's sympathies." For that matter, the French cinema industry is not conspicuously clerical; Pierre Fresnay is a Protestant; and the script-writer, Jean Anouilh, whose sensitive dialogue contributes so much to the success of the film, is an agnostic. Nor did the Church itself finance the production, the money being raised by the revolutionary method—revolutionary in the sphere of film finance—of taking up a national subscription. Appeals made throughout France produced contributions, large and small, from all sorts of individuals and organisations, subscriptions of 1000 francs being regarded as shares in the venture, to be repaid when the profits start to come in. In fact, these profits will probably be fairly considerable, judging by the long runs *Monsieur Vincent* is having everywhere—a very happy outcome for a film which not only breaks with tradition in the treatment of religious subjects but which also

proves what may be accomplished creatively when production can be divorced from the demands of some cinema magnate or commercial enterprise mainly interested in securing, at the box-office, a good return for an investment.

ONE old (pre-war) French film which I ran to earth in triumph on the Champs-Élysées was *Les Perles de la Couronne*, a delightfully amusing and "typical" production by Sacha Guitry, whom until then I had seen only in *The Cheat*, shown in New Zealand some years ago, and more recently in *Nine Bachelors*. I have since seen Guitry, in the flesh, on the stage of the Théâtre Edouard Sept (yes, our King Edward; there's an equestrian statue of him in the little square outside). Guitry was playing the leading role, and as usual taking almost all of the limelight, in his own play *Le Diable Boiteux* (*The Limping Devil*) dealing with the life of Talleyrand. He looks much older now than he did in the three films I've mentioned—he is, I think, 62—which is perhaps not surprising, in view of the rather uncomfortable situation in which he found himself just after the Liberation. But he is still a great actor, brimming with ideas and vitality; and though my French wasn't equal to all the double-entendres with which his dialogue is peppered, it was obvious even to me that he was, through the mouth of Talleyrand, getting in some shrewd jabs at the current political situation in France as well as at his own fairly recent period in prison. The French, who live for politics, thoroughly appreciated them.

DON'T let me give the impression that all the films in Paris are worth seeing or that the French themselves make only good ones. The French industry at the moment is in the doldrums, with, it is estimated, anything up to 80 per cent of the workers in it unemployed—a result attributed to the Blum-Byrnes Agreement under which only four out of every 13 weeks of playing-time in France are devoted to French productions. (At the time of writing there is strong pressure on the Government to increase the allocation for French films to seven weeks out of 13, and a rather more dubious move to restrict the screening of "mediocre" American films by some form of censorship.) One of two not-so-good French efforts to have come my way is *Les Requins de Gibraltar* ("The Sharks of Gibraltar"), a spy thriller in which the French idea of the British Navy and of high society in England is as ludicrous as anything the Americans—or the English—have ever perpetrated. The other is *Ruy Blas*, a costume piece contrived by Jean Cocteau from Victor Hugo's drama, with



THE LATE PIRELLA LA GUARDIA
His scorn steals a show